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9007 / DEC 10 - DEC 24, 2009
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VUEWEEKLY

'Tis the Season?

Charities feel the pinch from the economic downturn [Bryan Birtles / 8]



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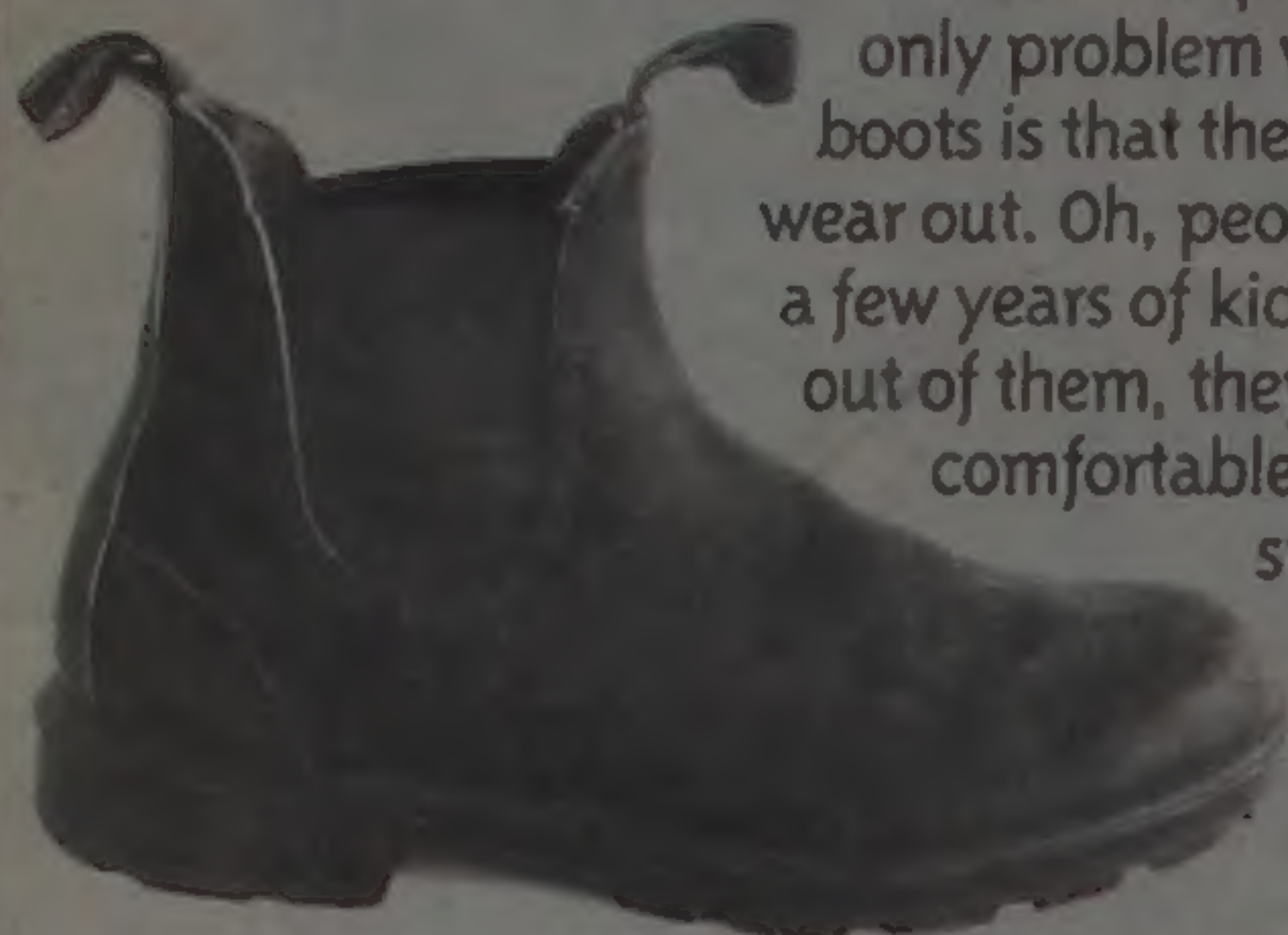
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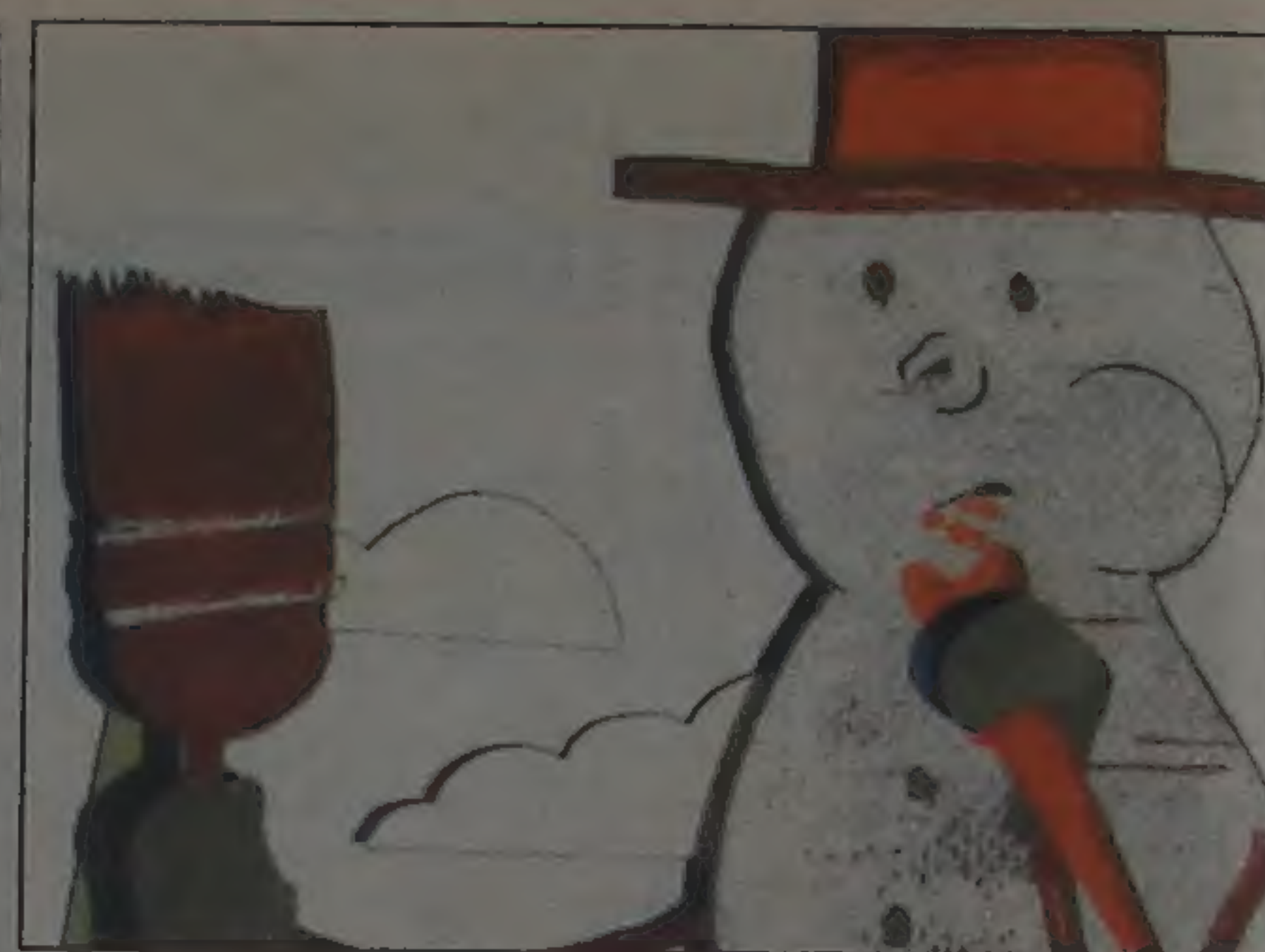
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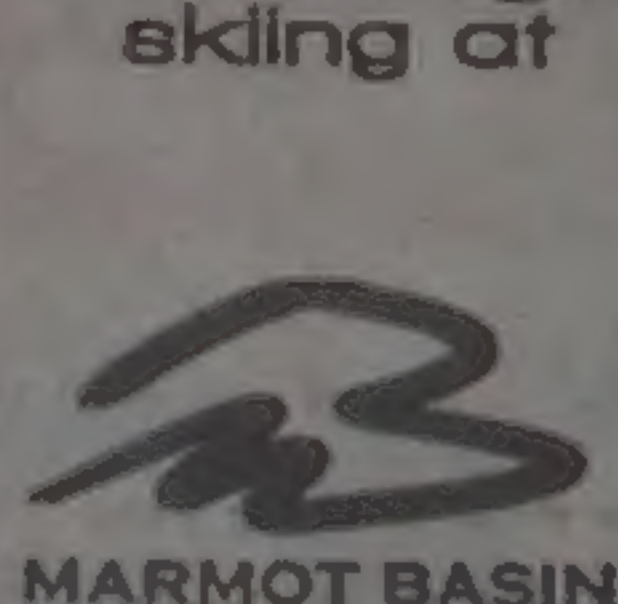
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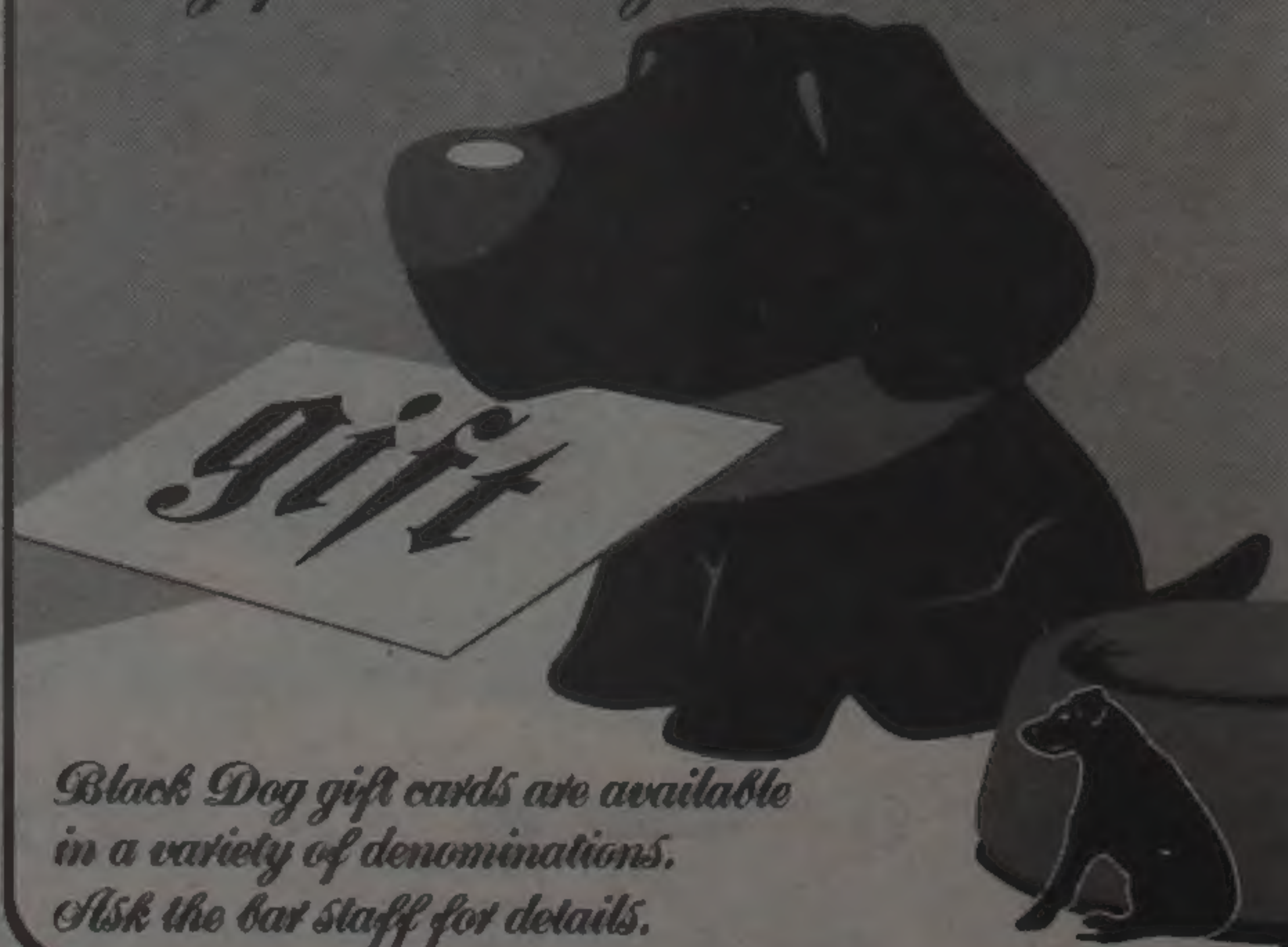
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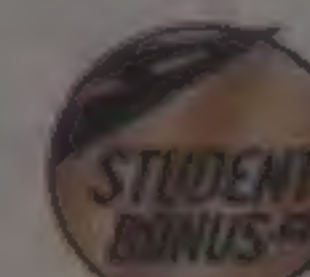
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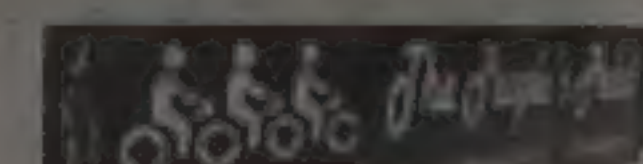
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Encouraging debate

SCOTT HARRIS / scott@vueweekly.com

You can tell a lot about the democratic credentials of a government by looking at the way in which it deals with voices that don't echo its own views or ideology. Healthy democracies need opposing perspectives to balance out the power of the government and to offer up alternative information and visions for debate in the public sphere. Such dialogue is especially important in places like Alberta, which hasn't seen a change in government for longer than many of its citizens have been alive.

Unfortunately, encouraging—or even tolerating—critical voices isn't something that is looked on very favourably by the provincial government. Culture Minister Lindsay Blackett last week told the CBC that he is considering adding mechanisms to the Alberta Film Development Program that would allow the government to exercise more creative control over films that receive provincial funding. Blackett is looking at the move after learning that *Downstream*, a documentary short about Dr John O'Connor, who came to prominence after revealing a cluster of rare cancers in the community of Fort Chipewyan that might be linked to the tar sands, had received funding under the program.

"If I'm going to actually invest money on behalf of Albertans into a film, the whole idea is to show Alberta in a better light, to create an economic diversification to help them, so anything that's going to be negative is only going to be a negative impetus on this province," Blackett told the CBC.

The point of the program, of course, is actually to encourage filmmakers to come to Alberta and to hire Albertan talent, not to produce propaganda for the provincial government—that's what the Public Affairs Bureau is for.

Like Stephen Harper before him with similar provisions in Bill C-10, Blackett has since backtracked on his comments, but the fact that he made them in the first place sends a troubling message.

Whether the government is willing to admit it or not, the tar sands are controversial and a legitimate debate about them needs to happen. The issue of whether and how to develop the tar sands is a critical one, and Albertans need perspectives from all sides to allow them to participate in the conversation about the merits and drawbacks of development. Encouraging such a debate is exactly where public money ought to be going. ▼



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MAIL LETTERS

SKIING IN EUROPE IS DOING JUST FINE

Err, "Five years of sketchy snow conditions" in Europe ("European drought is finally over," Dec 11 - Dec 18, 2008)? I don't think so.

There were those two poor months—November and December 2006, I think—is that what you've stretched to five years?

Over five years snow in the Alps has been as deep as ever. This year it is setting incredible records, with three-metre accumulations already at many top resorts, heading towards four metres at some (Fernie eat your heart out).

Last winter Kitzbuhel had its earliest ever opening in its 80 year history—early November 6, weeks ahead of schedule.

It has caused problems—airports closed, power lines down, off-piste skiers killed in avalanches.

For sketchy snow conditions over five years you'd be better looking closer to home. I recall, I think, most of the East having to close down this time last year because it was too warm even for the snow guns to work. And BC isn't looking very fabulous right now is it?

I hope it'll dump down soon, though,

as I've booked a fortnight in Revelstoke/Banff at Easter!

All the best from Scotland.

PATRICK THORNE

WOMEN AND POLITICS

Before the recent political turmoil it was unusual to see women writing in the print or online comment sections of political stories in regional and national media. That has changed, and we're seeing thoughtful comments from women amongst mostly male comments.

I say thank goodness. It's about time that women spoke up—they are after all about 50 per cent of eligible voters.

Many women have jobs that will be affected by a government that doesn't understand the role it has to play in helping to maintain jobs. They have husbands, sons, fathers and family that will be affected by a heartless or heedless federal government. They have pension plans that have been negatively affected by government actions and by government inaction. Apparently women are tired of a government that puts grasping power ahead of actually governing.

They have seen the reduction in funding for women's groups and they saw the flawed attempt by the Harper government to cut off MP funding. They don't want to go back to hearing about "cash in brown bag" financing. And who can disagree?

Too many women stayed away from the

polls this last October election—I don't expect that to happen in the next election. Likewise, too many husbands and other male relatives also stayed away last election—I expect that women will talk about that to them before the next election.

DON WILSON

SHOT THROUGH THE HEART

An economy can skip a heartbeat now and again. It can even have an irregular rhythm—although unhealthy it is not fatal. Stopping a heart is another matter.

In November, 71 000 Canadians lost their jobs. For those families, their economic heart has stopped. Rather than do anything to prevent fatal economic heart attacks, Mr Harper's team was busy wiretapping his opposition. He suspended Parliament to avoid Parliament. The prime minister's economic plan was to, "invest in the stock market."

Apparently, Watergate and banana republic tactics are more interesting to Mr Harper than helping Canadians.

EUGENE PARKS

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Doctor, doctor give me the news

Alberta Liberals pin their hopes on Dr David Swann to lead the party

SCOTT HARRIS / scott@vuwweekly.com

It was one of the shortest leadership conventions in Alberta's political history, and far from the one that attracted the most attention. But despite competing with an economic meltdown, a high-profile change in the leadership of their national counterparts and the holiday shopping season, the Alberta Liberal Party on December 13 picked Dr David Swann on the first ballot to replace outgoing leader Kevin Taft.

Swann garnered the support of 2468 mail-in votes, or 54 per cent of the 4599 ballots returned out of the 6258 sent to registered members. Dave Taylor, who by most accounts was the favourite to win the three-way contest, was a distant second with 1616 votes. Edmonton-based candidate Mo Elsalhy came third with 491 votes.

The 59-year old Swann, a former family doctor, came to prominence in 2002 after he was dismissed from his position as the medical health officer for the Palliser Health Region for supporting a resolution by the Alberta Society of Health Officers which called for greater action on climate change. He declined an offer to return to his job following public outcry, and instead made a series of humanitarian visits to Iraq, which was then suffering the effects of a decade of US-led sanctions. Swann was elected MLA for Calgary Mountain View in 2004 and re-elected in 2008.

While Swann is highly regarded for his social and environmental activism, he inherits a Liberal Party which was reduced to just nine seats in the last election and is saddled with a debt in excess of \$400 000 dollars and an emaciated membership. *Vue* spoke to David Swann about his win and where he hopes to take the Liberal Party in the coming years.

VUE WEEKLY: Congratulations on your win. How are you feeling?

DAVID SWANN: Thank you very much. It's been very exciting, as you can imagine. A big convention and media constantly since then and lots of congratulatory letters and comments coming in. It's been wonderful.

VW: You've spoken a great deal about the need for significant change in the Liberal Party, saying "everything is on

NEWS | POLITICS

the table." How do you start the process of making the changes you see as being necessary?

DS: Fundamentally it's bringing everyone together that's already committed themselves to this party and talking again about what we stand for, where we're going in the next two to three years and how we're going to get there—our strategies—looking at everything from our communication strategy to our key policy recommendations to how we're going to reach the largest non-voting population in Canada and inspire them again with the possibility of renewing our democracy and helping them to realize that they can make a significant difference to a healthier democratic political culture in this province.

VW: How do you see that conversation relating to the nuts-and-bolts issues of having to expand the membership base, deal with the party's debt and build other party infrastructure?

DS: I think they're really connected. If we do not inspire people to believe that they can make a difference and that they can be part of a longer movement for democratic renewal in this province then we haven't done our job.

None of the parties have inspired people to believe that they can make a difference and I intend to do that with this centrist party called the Alberta Liberal Party, that stands for the public interest for the long-term. That is what people across the province have told me has been missing in Alberta: a party that stands for the public interest for the long-term and will consistently make this government accountable and create an alternative to the government in the next three to four years.

That's going to happen through not only our existing 6200 members reaching out to others, but it's going to be part of a new media campaign that I hope we're going to come to and whatever other measures we can take to connect with people in their communities and help them to get involved, either in their own constituency or to get involved in the bigger provincial party.



VW: Do you have goals for where you'd like to see the Liberal Party two years from now?

DS: We're at 6000 members now and I'd like to triple that, at least, within the next three years. That's going to take some focused attention, but if we had 18 000 members, 20 000 members and they'd donate \$10 a month we would deal with our debt in a year, we would have a fund there for the next election and we would have sufficient funding to actually have a full staff in our party office. Those are fundamentals to having an effective party: you have to have funding, you have to have staff, and as much as anything the vision—we have to inspire Albertans that we see bringing Alberta into the 21st century as a priority and we don't feel this government has been doing anything very progressive in that respect. It's been the same old focus—which has been a very formidable focus—on the oil and gas sector. But that's changing around the world and we have to change with it.

VW: There's been a major change in the economic situation in the province since you started your leadership bid, with the boom going bust. How do you think those changes impact what Albertans are looking for from political leaders in the province?

DS: I guess the other side of the management issue has to do with putting away some of our resources, especially

our non-renewable resources, for this very eventuality. This is the rainy day that Lougheed foresaw when he set up the Heritage Fund, and this government has really neglected it for so many years that it's actually worth less now than it was in his day in real dollars. So that's part of what I'm saying about better management and better leadership—all Albertans are looking for that and that's what we're going to be focusing some attention on.

Of course this economic meltdown has not been predictable. We have to deal with it now in a very systematic and careful way. To me it does also present opportunities for Albertans and for our best thinkers and new technology to move us towards a greener economy, towards these newer technologies that will help us, for example, plan our cities better, plan our public transportation systems better, look at new energy sources, improve our energy efficiency in homes and businesses. These are real opportunities for us to move into the 21st century.

VW: You came to prominence being outspoken on health and environmental issues, and the province's main economic engine, the oil sands, is increasingly coming under fire for its impact on both. What do you think needs to happen in terms of development in the oil sands?

DS: Well, the oil and gas sector,

including the oil sands, has been a tremendous boon to our economy and to our development in this province, but what has been lacking is a management plan for that. A management plan that sets clear limits on water, air and land use and that shows the Albertan population that the free market does not trump everything, that we have a government in place to actually measure and monitor and enforce standards so that in 50 years we are not left with a desert, but in fact that we look at the pace and scope of the development in the context of animal habitat and land protection and infrastructure for people, and as I say, setting thresholds on the environmental impact that this has. This government seems to believe that a hands-off approach will serve Albertans for the long-term and more and more people—including the international community—are condemning this approach to development.

VW: Do you see the potential for more collaboration between the Liberals and the NDP and Greens in Alberta?

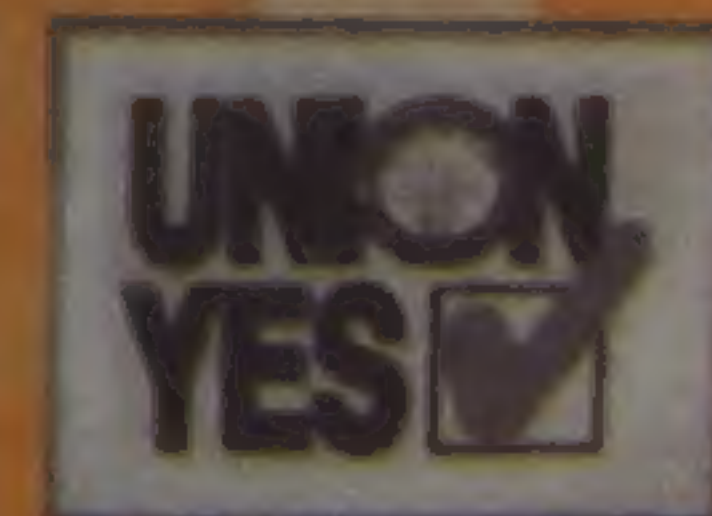
DS: Let me say I'm open to collaborating with anyone who wants to put the public interest for the long-term on the agenda and debate how we get there. That is my purpose for being in politics, and I look forward to working with Brian Mason and George Read, or whoever is leading the Green Party.

But the fundamentals as we see them today are that people are looking for a centrist party that stands for a triple bottom line. The three parts of the stool are economic, environmental and social, that's what government's bottom line is. And what I'm trying to say to both business and the general populace is that the government should be standing for that. That's its primary role, to have a triple bottom line as opposed to simply an economic bottom line which seems to drive this government.

And we are the party that will do that. I've talked to Conservatives who are not happy with the way this government is managing any of those three and I've talked to New Democrats and to Greens who see me and who see this party as the possible alternative for finally breaking the juggernaut that is the Conservative hold on this province for the last 37 years. ▽

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Not the best of times for the worst of times

Local charities hopeful about Christmas campaigns, concerned as tough economic times seem likely to impact donations in 2009

BRYAN BIRTLES / bryan@vuwweekly.com

Dominating every news outlet and water-cooler discussion, the recent economic downturn is on everyone's mind, especially as Canadians head into the holiday season. Usually a time when more attention is paid to the less fortunate among us, the ability of Canadians to give to charities this holiday season may be impeded by concerns about the impending economic troubles that awaits them around the corner in 2009.

Charities that rely on the generosity of the public face a double-edged sword during recessions: donations going down at the same time that need for the services they provide goes up. And coming just prior to the holiday season—a time when many charities plan their major push for donations that will carry them through the year—this slowdown of the economy couldn't have come at a worse time.

Tony Hudson, president of the Lung Association of Alberta and NWT, says that his organization's seasonal fundraiser Christmas Seals—celebrating its 100th anniversary this year—is already feeling the pinch. The campaign is usually well on its way to reaching its fundraising goal by mid-December, but Hudson explains that this year is different.

"We're not halfway to our goal yet," he says. "Especially because it's our 100th anniversary we want to have a good year, but we're down about \$400 000 from our goal."

The Lung Association has been working hard at informing the public about its campaign, and Hudson remains optimistic that Edmontonians will rise to the challenge and help the Christmas Seals campaign reach its target.

Sharing Hudson's optimism about the generosity of Edmontonians is David Fowler, a member of the board of directors for the Edmonton-based charity Santas Anonymous, which collects and distributes Christmas gifts to less-fortunate children in the city. Having worked with the charity in some capacity for 50 years, Fowler explains that while donations of new toys tend to come in slowly during the first half of the month, by the time the middle of December rolls around they can barely keep up.

"It never changes," he laughs. "The public never seems to contribute heavily to this campaign until the 15th of December, so we have to survive up until that time. And you can imagine how much work we have to do, with what we can save from the year before, the motorcycle run, the football game and just what's come in."

While Fowler may not be worried yet about the level of support Santas Anonymous has seen so far this year, 630 CHED—the radio station that is the driving force behind the charity—has been running ads imploring Edmontonians to donate, while at the same time

NEWS | CHARITIES

referencing the fact that such generosity may be more difficult in uncertain economic circumstances such as these.

In previous recessions, including the downturn in the early 1990s, however, Santas Anonymous has managed to find the support it needed to deliver the goods to deserving children.

"This campaign has a remarkable rapport with the community," says Fowler. "To me it's truly amazing."

GETTING THE MESSAGE OUT about the increased need in tough times is a strategy that has also worked in the past for Edmonton's Food Bank, and one that resource development coordinator Tamisan Bencz-Knight is optimistic will be effective again through the organization's annual Christmas campaign.

Referring to this year's Heritage Festival, where rain threatened to keep the Food Bank from reaching their donation goals at one of the most important events of the year for the agency, a well-timed request for donations through the media made it possible for the organization to meet and even surpass their target.

"As long as we communicate with people about our needs as an organization Edmontonians always come through for us," Bencz-Knight says. "We're fortunate as an organization that we're in Edmonton. Across the country there's no other food bank that can compare to Edmonton's and with the support that we have from the community—we are absolutely so fortunate. It's not only big business that supports us, it's the individuals here in Edmonton that support us and that's what we're truly appreciative of."

Even in the early 1990s, when a recession combined with government cutbacks greatly increased demand on Food Bank support and decreased the community's ability to contribute, the Food Bank was able to weather the storm, and Bencz-Knight is confident they can make it through the current crisis.

"Although we are concerned, we're quite optimistic because of the support of the community. I may be changing my tune in a year if I go, 'Oh, wow, nobody is able to help us,' and that may happen. That's what happened in the mid-'90s when there was all the cutbacks and stuff like that," she says. "I know that if we do go down it's because people do think of us, but they have to think of themselves too."

IMAGINE CANADA is a national organization that does research into Canada's charitable and voluntary sectors and helps to shape public policy around these sectors. Along with the group's volunteer chair Don McCreesh, Imagine Canada's CEO Marcel Lauziere recently circulated an open letter to Prime Minis-

ter Stephen Harper regarding the economic downturn and the impact it might have on Canadian charities. Prior to the government's recent economic update, Imagine was worried that funding to non-profits and charities might be cut in order to avoid a deficit, and circulated the

letter—endorsed by 75 charitable organizations from coast to coast—in an effort to persuade the government to leave funding levels where they were.

"The message was a relatively simple one, which is that in these times of economic turmoil the role of charities and non-profit



organizations is critical," explains Lauziere. "In a time when the economy is going through some difficulty, and where we certainly risk seeing some increased demand on services, it's really important to remember that these organizations can play a really important role in helping Canadians get through these tough economic times."

Lauziere has heard from some charitable and non-profit organizations that have already been hit hard by the downturn, and he says that the consensus around the country is that while Christmas 2008 will likely see most charities still in relatively good shape, the future is going to be difficult.

"It's that perfect storm where for organizations, all of their different revenue sources will be hit in a major way because the market is going down so those that give major gifts are thinking twice or deciding to delay, so there's an impact there. Canadians' ability to give, if we see unemployment rise and see economic hardship, that's going to be challenged. Governments looking at how they're going to reduce their own expenditures is going to have an impact also. And then the biggest source of revenue

for charitable and non-profits is through earned income, through services they provide, and we may see Canadians have a reduced ability to pay for their services. All of that is putting organizations in a very difficult situation."

What's worse, says Lauziere, is that the structural changes in society that have happened since the 1990s are likely to increase the pressures on charitable organizations to levels unseen during any previous recession.

"We know that times were difficult in the early '90s—we saw that need really went up and we also know that Canadians really come out in those times to help out and to donate and that's really great," Lauziere says, before suggesting that the current economic slowdown we are mired in will likely be much worse.

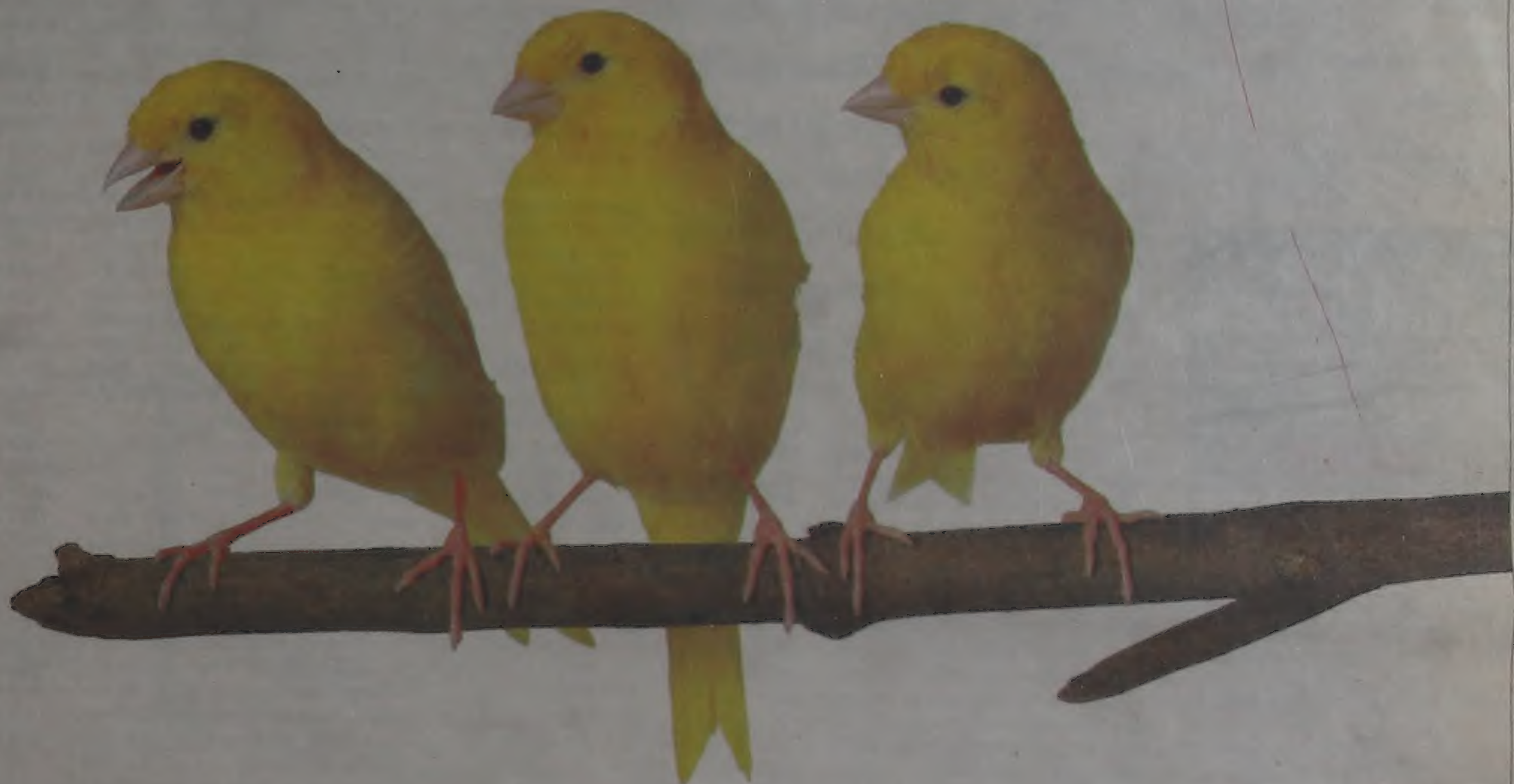
"Think of where we were in the '90s in terms of homelessness issues, nothing [compared to] where we are right now. The use of food banks—almost unknown at the end of the 1980s, but now they're mainstream almost. If we look at employment insurance and the percentage of people that were supported through employment insurance there is certainly more challenge than

there was at that time. So the context has changed quite a bit and I think some of the challenges we're going to be facing aren't challenges we've faced in the past, or at least not in a long amount of time."

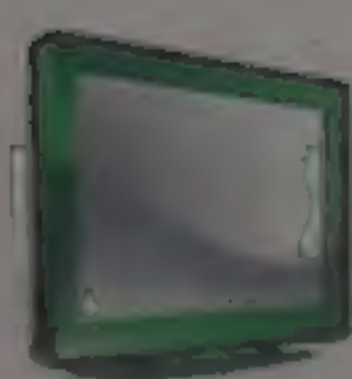
There are a variety of things Lauziere says the government can do to increase support to the charitable sector. Charities and non-profits need to be remembered in the context of economic stimulus, because it is these groups that will be sorely needed to assist everyday Canadians in navigating their way out of the recession. Direct economic stimulus as well as increased tax credits to stimulate charitable giving would go a long way in ensuring the vitality of the charitable sector. Though there's plenty of doom and gloom on the horizon, Lauziere is confident that charities and non-profit organizations will somehow find their way through this recession.

"Organizations are resilient, they're going to find all kinds of creative ways to work through this, but certainly they'll need the support not only of individual Canadians but also governments to help them through their work." ▽

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TOP 10 RINGTONES

- 1) T.I. Whatever You Like
- 2) Kevin Rudolf And Lil Wayne Let It Rock
- 3) Beyonce Single Ladies (Put A Ring On It)
- 4) Katy Perry Hot N Cold
- 5) Lady GaGa Poker Face
- 6) Mariah Carey All I Want For Christmas Is You
- 7) Killers, The Human
- 8) T.I. Live Your Life Feat. Rihanna
- 9) Paramore Decode
- 10) Britney Spears Womanizer

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Tommy's vision

Keep people well, don't just patch them up

HEALTH | **WELL, WELL, WELL**
CONNIE HOWARD
health@vueweekly.com

'Tis the season of goodwill and peace and social justice, and this is a story about how we're doing with Tommy Douglas's vision of health care, and about a man I know who went abruptly from decades of fit and healthy to very ill, and about his expensive climb back.

He passes out one day, falls, recovers, forgets it happened. It happens again, and then again, and then regularly enough that it gets his attention. ECGs and cholesterol measures and other tests show nothing; a specialist finally decides it is the control centre not doing its job of keeping his heart rhythm strong and regular, and, as he flatlines in the presence of the doctor one day while hooked up to a monitor, it is immediately decided the condition is severe enough to warrant a pacemaker.

He gets the pacemaker, and everyone who knows him is relieved to have the risk of cardiac arrest removed. But with the pacemaker comes a staph infection, which gets missed by his doctors long enough to nearly kill him. It's finally diagnosed, he's on big-gun antibiotics for a very long time, and then gets the old infected pacemaker removed and a new one put in. The antibiotics continue.

He's declared well, and he's thankful to be alive, but it's obvious he's not his former self. The stress of two surgeries,

a very serious infection and long-term powerful antibiotic use have taken their toll. He's extremely thin, has little energy, is clinically depressed, has a number of other complications from surgery and though thankful for modern medicine's offerings of pacemakers, antibiotics and other miracle-working drugs he is clearly anything but well.

He is now, a number of years later, finally well, and happy not to have to worry about his heart taking unexpected vacations. But though he and his wife now sleep easy thanks to modern medicine, he also almost died thanks to modern medicine, and is now fully well thanks to his naturopathic doctor, who restored what the complications of surgery and the long-term antibiotic use had stolen.

To get well, to pull out of the post-op devastation, he had to pay out of his own pocket—a lot—and this, in a land of plenty and universal health care, is wrong.

HE IS ALSO WELL thanks to a lifetime of staying fit, living simply, being frugal and having a bit of a savings account. Because to get well, to pull out of the post-op devastation, he had to pay out of his own pocket—a lot—and this, in a land of plenty and universal health care, is wrong.

Thousands of us climb back to health with naturopathic health care; thousands of us would rather manage our Achilles heel that way than take a vacation or own a home—and we're the lucky ones. Many of us can't afford our prescriptions, many more can only dream of access to naturopathic health care, and too many very sadly can't even afford daily high quality nutrition.

We do need disease care, obviously, but if it were balanced with Tommy Douglas's original vision of a system designed to keep people well rather than patch them up once they're sick we'd need a lot less disease care. If that system included integrated holistic follow-up on the adverse effects of surgeries and medication, and if it included essential nutrition for the hungry or addicted, we'd have truly progressive health care.

I have a poet friend who cares a lot about those mostly going without, those who dream of a hot meal, of any kind of food, even bad food, those for whom vibrant health may always be out of reach. Last December, after buying someone who'd clearly spent the night outside a hot chocolate, he had this idea: "What say, one cold snowy December morning we beg or steal all the patio gas heaters, set them up on their poles all along the downtown streets and avenues, then call all the libidinous young men who always have sub-woofers in the trunks of their cars, give them only Taj Mahal CDs to play, and take a conga-line to work?" Count me in Steve. ♥

Global Zero

Conditions promising to move towards a world without nuclear weapons

COMMENT | **DYER STRAIGHT**
GWYNNE DYER
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If Barack Obama sent the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty to Congress for ratification early in the new session, that would be an excellent start. Since it was signed in 1996, 148 other countries have ratified it, but it cannot come into effect until the United States does, too. And then he could get on with banning the nuclear weapons themselves, not just the tests.

There's a new initiative, launched in Paris on December 9 under the title Global Zero, in which more than a hundred world leaders endorse the goal of abolishing nuclear weapons completely. That may have a slightly antique ring to it—don't these people know that the Cold War ended ages ago?—but in fact the nuclear weapons are still there. Some 20 000 of them, in fact. And last July, at a rally in Berlin, Obama publicly adopted the same goal: "This is the moment to begin the work of seeking the peace of a world without nuclear weapons."

Admittedly, the hundred "world leaders" are mostly ex-world leaders, and they may be suffering from "retired general syndrome." All through their careers, generals loyally support the reigning orthodoxy about nuclear weapons, and are amply rewarded for it. Then they retire, the rewards and the status vanish, and some of them begin to wonder out loud if they ever really believed all that. Some people in the peace movement sarcastically call them "generals for peace," and suggest that they would have been more useful if they had seen the light when they still had some power.

Most of the hundred-plus notables who signed the Global Zero declaration were not generals, but they are almost all former something-or-others: former US President Jimmy Carter, former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, former British Foreign Secretary Margaret Beckett, former German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher, and former French Prime Minister Michel Rocard. Not to mention former US National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski, former British Defence Secretary Malcolm Rifkind, former Japanese Foreign Minister Yoriko Kawaguchi, Ehsan Ul-Haq, former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in Pakistan, and Brajesh Mishra, former Indian National Security Advisor. But for once, the "formers" are not the only ones talking sense.

What makes Global Zero more than the usual empty talk is the fact that this time all the leaders of the major powers seem to be on the same page. Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin has called for the elimination of all nuclear weapons, and British Prime Minister Gordon Brown said in March that the United Kingdom is ready to work for "a world that is free from nuclear

weapons." On December 8 French President Nicolas Sarkozy also gave his support to the goal of general nuclear disarmament.

Last June Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh backed the same goal, saying that "the only effective form of nuclear disarmament and elimination of nuclear weapons is global disarmament." Pakistan and China have said explicitly that they support Global Zero. In fact, the only countries that actually own nuclear weapons that have stayed silent are North Korea and Israel.

NORTH KOREA is less of a problem than it seems, because it could probably be persuaded to give up its one or two nuclear weapons in return for strong security guarantees and lots of foreign aid, especially if the United States were getting out of the nuclear weapons business too. Israel is a knottier problem, because it doesn't even admit that it has nuclear weapons (several hundred of them, in fact), but for the first time it could find itself facing pressure from the one country that really has leverage over Israeli policy, the United States.

One of the most striking aspects of the Global Zero meeting in Paris was the remark by Richard Burt, the man who handled the press conference, that Israel's undeclared nuclear arsenal would have to be part of the process. This will have caused consternation in Israel, because while Burt currently holds no official position in the US government, he was the chief US negotiator in the Strategic Arms Reduction Talks (START) with the former Soviet Union, and he probably wouldn't have said it if US policy were not moving in that direction.

But that's the real question: is the United States really ready to give up its nuclear weapons? It was the first country to have them, and it has built its grand strategy around them for the past 64 years. But if it were willing to do that, and if the Russians were really willing to follow suit, then that would account for 96 per cent of all the world's nuclear weapons, and it wouldn't be all that hard to cajole or pressure all the rest of the world's nuclear powers into doing the same.

It would take at least a decade to get to zero from here. First, ratify the test ban treaty. Then, in the forthcoming talks to renew or replace the START treaty between the US and Russia (which expires next year), agree on really radical reductions in American and Russian nuclear weapons. Then bring in the rest of the world for the final negotiations to outlaw nuclear weapons entirely.

It still sounds like a pipe dream, but in fact the conditions have never been as promising as they are now. If Obama takes the lead, it could actually happen—and even in the depths of a recession, it wouldn't cost anything. ♥

Gwynne Dyer is a London-based independent journalist whose articles are published in 45 countries. His column appears each week in Vue Weekly.

ISSUES

Opinion pieces are intended to comment on current events and broader issues of importance to the community. Their commentary is not necessarily the opinion of the organization they represent or of the Weekly.

It's time for real balance

Current economic situation makes sustainable, long-term solutions possible

RICARDO ACUÑA / ualberta.ca/parkland

The more time I spend looking at the policies and speeches of the Harper and Stelmach governments, the more I wonder if Conservatives are provided with special dictionaries when they take out party memberships. Or perhaps they're forced to undergo language re-training when they get elected.

Either way, I'm continually amazed by their ability to arbitrarily assign common words with meanings that I've never encountered in any dictionary I've ever looked at.

This has especially been the case again in the last few weeks as I have watched Ed Stelmach and his federal counterpart Stephen Harper try to articulate their responses to both the current global economic situation and the international climate change negotiations in Poznan, Poland.

Both Harper and Stelmach have spoken often about the looming global financial crisis, and the need to take concerted steps to ensure the long-term well-being of the economy at both a domestic and international level.

Harper, at gatherings of international leaders, has been unequivocal in his support for strong and quick collective action by the countries of the world to stop the economies of the world from collapsing completely.

Stelmach has likewise spent much of the last month talking about the need to take steps today to encourage ongoing investment and economic growth in Alberta.

On the topic of climate change, however, both leaders frequently use the word "balance" to justify their lack of action and urgency, and in the case of Harper, to justify his government's blatant obstructionism at the international climate change conference.

What they say is that although they recognize that climate change poses a significant threat to humanity action on climate change must be "balanced" with concern for the long-term well-being of the economy.

Now, my understanding of the word "balance" would indicate that what Harper and Stelmach are trying to do on climate change and the economy is come up with solutions and actions that would result in both the economy and the environment thriving and being sustainable over the long term.

It has become crystal clear from their actions, however, that this understanding of the word "balance" is very different from theirs.

How does, for example, Premier Stelmach's decision to provide a \$1.8 billion royalty holiday to encourage drilling of two unsustainable fossil fuels represent balance? Likewise his decision to dump \$2 billion into a far fetched scheme to hide CO₂ emissions in big holes rather than actually stopping them.

Wouldn't balance instead suggest taking that \$3.8 billion and using it as an incentive for invest-

ment in renewable energy and jobs?

HARPER AND STELMACH both seem to think that balance means ignoring the health, water and livelihood of First Nation communities on the Athabasca for the sake of encouraging investment in the tar sands. Or ignoring the prospect of permanent drought in southern Alberta, and with it the complete elimination of rural communities and family farmers, because stopping climate change requires moving away from fossil fuels. Or contaminating farmland and the North Saskatchewan River for the sake refining more oil and gas, or turning coal into gas.

Harper's government travelled to the negotiations in Poland to "protect Alberta's oil sands" from strict emissions targets designed to keep island nations like Kiribati and Tuvalu from disappearing completely within a decade as sea levels continue to rise—what exactly is being balanced there?

In my book, the word for these types of actions is not "balance" but "sacrifice." Northern Alberta's First Nations peoples, farmers in central Alberta, rural communities in the south and residents of developing island countries are all being sacrificed for the sake of continued oil and gas development and expansion in the province.

What makes it even more frustrating is that the current global economic situation and the renewed interest by governments in playing an active part in their economies, combined with the reality of peak oil and growing consciousness of the environment, make real balance not only necessary, but possible.

The opportunity exists today for visionary governments who are genuinely concerned about the long-term sustainability of the economy and environment to implement creative solutions which will achieve both. Make a bailout of the auto sector dependant on stopping the production of inefficient vehicles and a move toward greener cars and mass transit vehicles. Make a bailout of the banks dependant on reducing or eliminating investments in dirty energy and the provision of resources to renewable energy. Take advantage of the current dip in oil demand and prices to set a firm cap on production, and begin to scale that cap back on an annual basis.

It's time to stop hiding the sacrifice of people, the economy and the environment behind some warped understanding of balance. Real balance is possible today; all it requires is a little creativity and political will. It's time we started demanding that. We will all be better off as a result. ▀

Ricardo Acuña is a senior research fellow at the Institute, a non-partisan public policy research institute housed at the University of Alberta.



People's Pedal parked

City bicycle-sharing society shuts down after season of widespread bike theft

SCOTT HARRIS / scott@vueweekly.com

Edmonton's bicycle sharing society is calling it quits after a frustrating season that saw most of its fleet of signature red bicycles stolen.

The People's Pedal, which was founded in 2005, offered members access to a fleet of collective bikes stationed at outdoor "hubs" spread throughout the downtown core, Whyte Avenue and the university area. For an annual fee of \$25, members were given the code to the system's lock boxes, which let them borrow a bike for a few hours to run errands or go for a quick ride before returning the bike to any hub in the city.

Despite expanding its fleet from 25 bikes at five hubs in its first year to almost 100 bikes at 14 hubs in 2008, Scott McAnsh, the founder and president of the People's Pedal, says that the volunteer-run program simply couldn't solve the problem of bikes going missing.

"We had a really hard summer," explains a frustrated McAnsh. "We lost over 90 per cent of our bikes to theft, and that really affected morale. This summer we had around 200 members at any given moment, and part of what got me personally down was I would get a lot of emails and calls from members saying, 'I can't find a bike, this sucks.' And it did suck but we were doing everything we could and just couldn't keep up with the loss."

McAnsh explains that efforts to deal with the mounting theft throughout the summer resulted in a drop in the number of volunteers willing to put in the time necessary to keep the program running.

"At the beginning we had maybe 10 people who would regularly come and build bikes, and that steadily decreased to the point where by late-August we had just two or three people showing up at any given time," he says. "We also had a hub-monitor program, so we had another 10 people who just checked bikes regularly, but by halfway through the summer they'd check and there'd never be any bikes so they stopped checking. Basically the whole thing fell apart when we lost all our bikes."

He says that when volunteers visited the system's 14 hubs last week to collect the bikes for winter storage only five of the 100 bikes in the system remained.

THE CONCEPT The People's Pedal, which was first tried in the 1960s with Amsterdam's White Bicycle program, has taken off in more than a dozen cities in recent years.

In 2007 the city of Paris teamed up with an advertising company to start the Vélib' program, which now boasts a fleet of over 20 000 bicycles at 1450 automated pay stations, making it the world's largest bicycle-sharing system.

NEWS | CYCLING

The City of Montréal will launch its own bike share, called Bixi—a contraction of bicycle taxi—in the spring of 2009. The initial system will feature 3000 bikes at 300 stations.

McAnsh says that large systems such as these might be necessary to overcome the challenges the People's Pedal faced last season.

"The problems really aren't unique to Edmonton," he explains. "Vélib' had a 25 per cent loss rate in 2007, so that's a phenomenal number of bikes because they had 9000 bikes to start with. But they just keep going because they have the resources—it's a huge institution with lots of money, partially backed by the city and they just plow through."

While his group won't be running its bike share next year, McAnsh says they haven't given up on trying to bring the concept to Edmonton.

"The People's Pedal will continue to exist as a non-profit and we've sort of shifted mode to being an advocacy group to try and get someone with more capital than us to implement a bike-share program. Bike sharing, in what some have called 'phase three bike sharing'—so this new model that's partly computer monitored with self-served kiosks and fancy bikes—is really taking off. What the People's Pedal now wants to do is conduct research on how it's going elsewhere, what works, what doesn't, stay on top of city council and try to maybe find businesses in town that could benefit from it. So we're just trying to see how bike sharing can work in Edmonton and trying to find parties that can make it happen."

Despite the frustration of the past year, McAnsh still believes in the potential of bike sharing.

"I think that every urban area benefits from bikes, and the nice thing about a bike-sharing system is that it makes biking normal," he says. "In Paris now 30 per cent of bike trips are done on Vélib' bicycles and it's just become part of transit. It's normalized cycling in a way that private bike ownership doesn't because it approaches it on a more casual basis; you don't have to be a cyclist, you don't have to self-define as a cyclist or maintain a bike. If there's an adequately large bike-sharing program it can just be another mode of transit."

"Cycling obviously has a huge number of environmental benefits," he continues, "and it also has social benefits in that it can take cars off the road and make the city safer and more livable. In general cycling is awesome and I think bike sharing is a good way to get more people into cycling." ▀

A frigid winter's night

GAMES INFINITE LIVES

Obligatory weather-talk ... in case you've forgotten, your Facebook status updates, tweets, TV news programs, drive-time DJs and small-talking shopkeepers will be happy to remind you: it's colder than a witch's tits out there. But before the battery-killing frost dropped and the snow bunkered my wheels, I'd managed to lay in a store of emergency supplies, a tidy little stack of Microsoft Points loaded with the promise of longest-nights diversions.

The plan was to take a sightseeing tour of what's been making the scene on Xbox Community Games, the MS-enabled vector for mass-delivering indie and small-developer games. That little adventure will have

to wait a couple weeks; as so often happens when money (or money-like corporate units of exchange) is burning its hole, it ends up evaporating faster than one expects ... and it's not the scrappy independents who get the gelt. Rather than pile up a big basket of value-priced Community Games, I got distracted by the offerings of the Arcade proper; two clicks of "Confirm Download" later, and my points-hoard was reduced to virtual spare change.

First I got suckered by *A Kingdom for Keflings*, the light (as in "lite") pseudo-medieval city-building sim. This is another piece of convergent console evolution; just as Microsoft, as part of their New Xbox Experience, copped a riff from Wii in enabling players to create their own happy little cartoonish avatars—which tool, of course, is a pretty fun plaything in its own right—so too does *A Kingdom for Keflings* echo *Final Fantasy: My Life as a King*, with

which Nintendo flagshipped the launch of their WiiWare service. Seems the conventional industry wisdom is that casual—well, semi-casual anyway; *Keflings* and *MyLAAR* are more jacket-and-jeans than tank-top-and-sport-shorts—gamers will fork over for the chance to play petty despot. One wonders where Sony's at on this, why they went with an ultramodern look for their *Home* virtual world when it's obvious that timber is the new chrome.

Anyway, *Keflings* is pretty fun for a while and in small doses. Your avatar—your Xbox Live avatar, complete with his/her/its anachronistic duds—is a giant against the Lilliputian scale of the wee helpless Keflings, bossing them around not by giving orders but by picking them up bodily, their little legs kicking in terror, and physically shoving them into their jobs. There is pleasure in this. But, really, it's more a toy than a game; there's no real challenge or difficulty, and no payoff other than progressing down the technology tree—from basic houses, workshops and primary resource-gathering through to the development of artisan trades and the emergence of a Kefling mid-

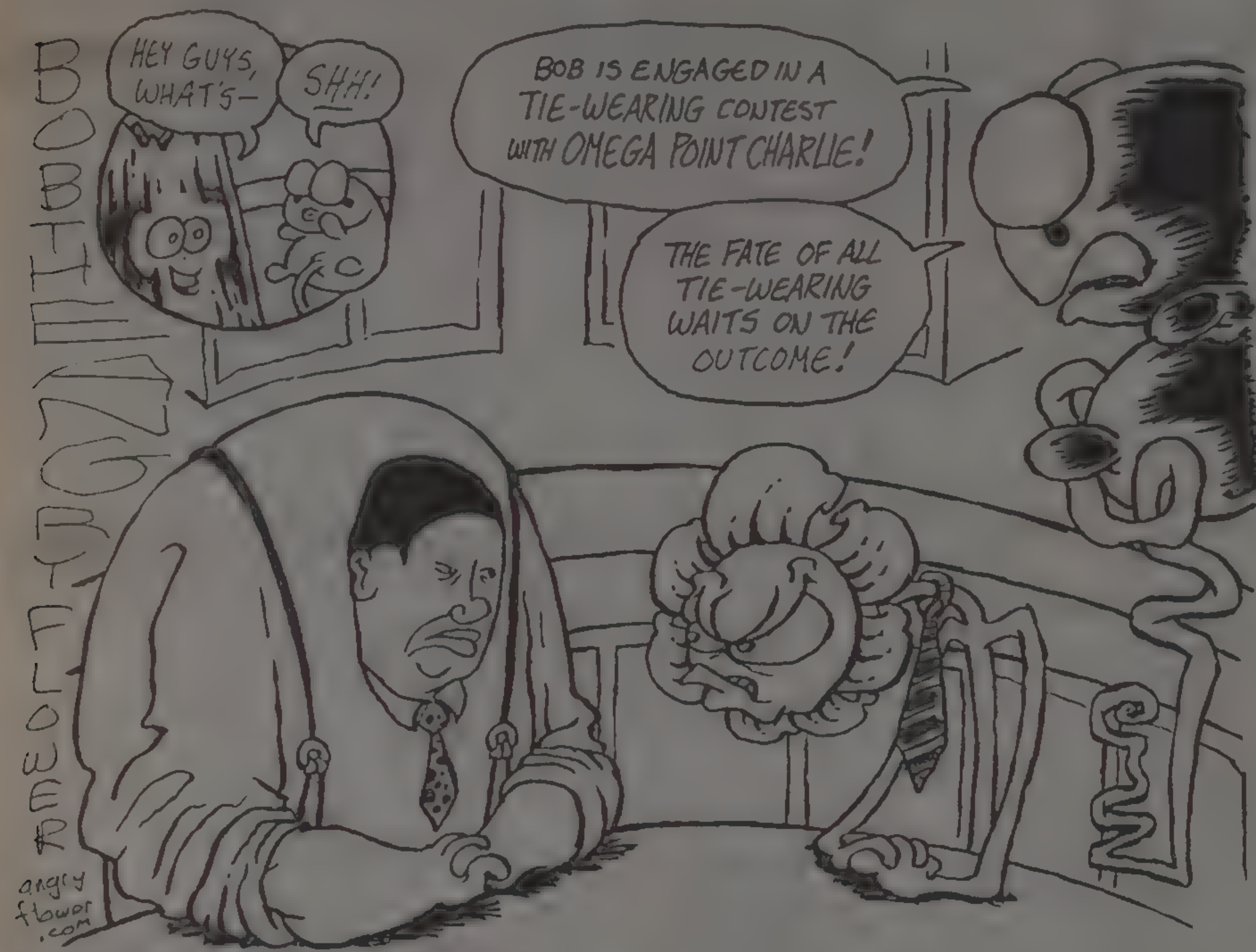
dle class—and watching your little village grow. Unless you count the payoff you get from imagining the legends the Keflings will be passing onto their future generations: "Yea, verily did a 30-foot-tall Kurt Cobain lookalike appear, and lo did he teach unto us the shearing of sheep and the pruning of topiary."

BY THE TIME the sun—the cold, mocking sun which gives glaring light but no heat—ended its six-hour-only above-the-horizon engagement, I was ready to move on to my other impulse purchase, the second episode of Penny Arcade's vanity RPG/adventure, *On The Rain-Slick Precipice of Darkness*. I've got a real soft spot for the Penny Arcade guys and their work, so buying their games feels more like supporting the scene than simply entertaining myself for a few hours.

A few solid hours. That's one thing about episodic games: you know that each chunk is going to be brief (relative to a days-devouring boxed title) so there's a tendency to snuggle yourself down for a single-sitting playthrough. Episode Two of *OTRSPD* is as Episode One was, an iron-

ic, foul-mouthed pastiche/sendup of Lovecraftian horror, pop culture and videogame conventions, presented with comic-book style. The humour ranges from laugh-out-loud to trying-too-hard, but the fucker is so goddamned thick with jokes that it benefits from the same mechanism that makes mind-reader acts successful: amid that barrage of business, you remember the hits and disregard the misses ... and leave wanting more.

Ah, but there's no more for me this morning; my online piggybank's nearly bust and it'll be a couple of days before the freeze breaks and I can get up to the shop to refill—I only use prepaid points, because once I get a credit card involved in this cycle, I'm fucked. What I have left could only get me a dismal packet of lame profile pictures, or maybe a crummy menu theme. In the spirit of the season, what I'm wishing for is a virtual Salvation Army kettle where I could dump my change and feel good knowing I'd helped provide the homeless with the *Geometry Wars* they'd otherwise have to go without. ▀



Boycott Chicago!

HOCKEY IN THE BOX
DAVE YOUNG AND TB PLAYER
inthebox@vultureweekly.com

Sit down. Here's the latest recap of last week's Oiler games. Let's see. The Oilers lost 2-0 to Florida. That's pretty embarrassing, isn't it? Things got better, though! The Vancouver Canucks came to town and the Oilers shut the Nucks out 3-0. And last Tuesday night ... let us go back. What happened Tuesday night? House was a rerun, the (ack) Flames won in St Louis, Gary Bettman was in town and the Oilers scored two goals against Chicago. (But Chicago scored nine goals against Edmonton). Merry Christmas!

SLAPSHOT 3: THE JUNIOR LEAGUE (OR TB LOSES 91 MINUTES OF HIS LIFE) It's often said if you don't have anything nice to say, don't say anything at all. However, if I were to follow this advice, this review would be over by now. Easy for me—not very informative for you. And really, if I have to watch this shit-sandwich of a movie, I should have something to show for it. So, let me relive the horror for you so you don't have to.

First off, let's talk about the plot. It takes a very special talent to write a script that is so totally unbelievable while simultaneously being so painfully predictable. I've watched documentaries with more surprising plot twists. As for the acting, what does it say when the best actor in a film (by far) is Leslie Nielsen? The main characters were all lifted from bad after-school specials: we saw the misunderstood orphan boy with a heart of gold, the eccentric-yet-amazingly talented love interest, the Cruella De Ville-esque evil businesswoman and more clichés. The Hanson Brothers return to the screen, but with performances so bad I wish the brothers from the first movie could travel forward in time just to kick their own asses. Now, that should be *Slap Shot 4*. The showstopper (I'm using that term literally) was an incredibly awkward two-minute appearance by Mark Messier that made his

Lay's chip commercials look like high art. As for the "humour" in this "comedy," the gags were mostly terrible or just plain ripped off from the first movie.

All in all, this movie sucked. Surprise! It was one hour and 31 minutes I could have spent putting out cigarettes on my forehead and I would have been better off for it. If I had to say one positive thing about this movie, it would be this: at least it was better than *Slap Shot 2: Breaking the Ice*. TB

BLACKHAWKS DOWNER As bad as *Slap Shot 3* sounds, Tuesday night's debacle at Rexall was worse. The 9-2 loss was brutal. My suggestion? Let's take out our frustrations on Chicago. And not just the Hawks, but the city, its favourite sons and daughters and its sports teams. After all, the Hawks are the same team that shut out the Oilers in October, ending a four-game winning streak and kicking off a five-game winless streak, effectively killing some early season optimism. They are also the same team that beat the Oilers by a seven-goal margin two more times. The Hawks waxed the Oilers 8-1 in 1992 and 7-0 in 1995. Jerks. So, let's start by boycotting *Chicago: The Musical* (that will be easy), the Cubs, the White Sox, the Bulls, Da Bears, Oprah, Chicago hot dogs, the band Chicago (again, easy), Mike Ditka, Jim Belushi, John Cusack, Al Capone, Gary Sinise and his Steppenwolf Theatre cronies, the Chicago typeface and that arrogant Sears Tower. And, for now, the following Chicago folk are just on notice: Barack Obama, Bill Murray, former Hawk Glenn Hall, former Hawk Ethan Moreau, *The Untouchables* and Mr. T. But watch out, The Oilers face the dastardly Blackhawks again on February 3. Anything less than a convincing Oiler win and even those on notice join the shit list. Except maybe Mr. T. After all, he does pity fools. DY

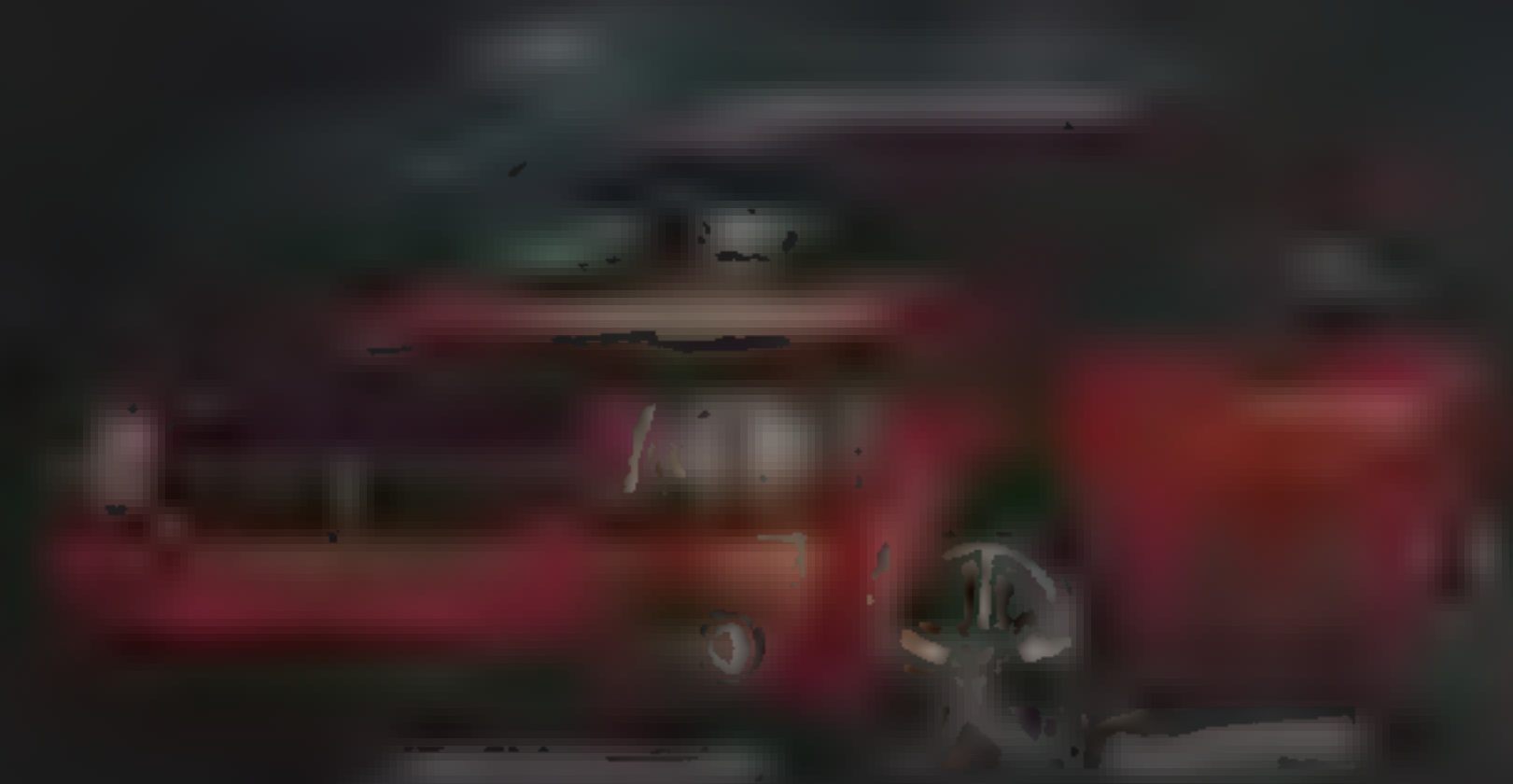
THIS WEEK'S OILER DEFINITION
"Humiliating": 1) Lowering the pride, self-respect or dignity of a person; mortifying. 2) Oilers 2, Hawks 9—December 17, 2008. Humiliating for fans and players alike. ▀

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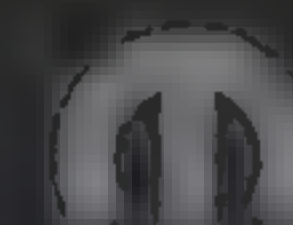
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Origin India the real deal

GORDON MORASH / gordon@vuwweekly.com

I have an unabiding love for the food of India, and in this town, I have many suitors. Truth be told, over the past decade, there has been a profusion of Tastes, Grills, Palaces, and Gardens all denoted with the name India. But not until the past two months has there been a restaurant with the guts to tag itself with the word "Origin," as if to saucily say—appropriately, I might add—that if you want the real thing, here is where you go.

Located in busy Old Strathcona, right below Filthy McNasty's pub—was there ever a better-named place for a first date?—**Origin India** is a dressed-in-brown ceramic-tiled leather-lounge-style restaurant whose horizontally layered wine bottles-as-decorations tell you this is no typical Indian place. Indeed, manager Arvind Sawhney spends much of his time telling you why wine is a better accompaniment to his food than beer, and that you should really try the fresh-cooked items from the kitchen rather than the \$19.95 10-course buffet.

On both cases, he is absolutely right. When properly chosen, a spicy Gewurtztraminer or a nice, buttery Chardonnay match well the high seasoning often found in Indian food. So, too, does the Californian house red, Gnarly Head Old Vine Zin (\$10 per glass), with its spice and robust berry. As for the buffet aspect, well, this is Whyte Avenue, after all, and when you're in a student and foot-traffic ghetto, that's liable to be the audience

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you draw. Nonetheless, there are several hotels in the area with a built-in audience for food that adventurous, freshly prepared, and still singing of spice.

So what did we do? We split the difference with one of us choosing the buffet—to get the sampling heft over with—and the other a selection of meat and vegetarian dishes that could demonstrate what this kitchen could do on order.

As it stands, the menu has a good selection of the traditional appetizers (samosas, pakora, tikkas, kababs and tandoori chicken) in the \$6-\$15 range, meat and vegetarian platters (\$17 and \$13 respectively), soft naan bread fresh from the tandoor oven (\$3-\$5), a selection of biryani (vegetarian, chicken, beef, lamb and shrimp, \$14-\$19), and 15 meat curries (in butter, karahi, boona, and vindaloo varieties, \$16-\$19), and another 11 vegetarian entrées (\$12-\$15).

ON A CHILLY NIGHT, there are few places you would rather be, and it's not just because of the food. The room itself is warming, and absent the many Indian knick-knacks you find in most restaurants of its ilk. It's also wheelchair-accessible. The buffet area is actually out of sight when you first arrive, the first signal you have

that you might be interested in the made-to-order dishes. Not that the buffet suffers—food is not kept steam-tabled for hours, but is gradually replenished.

This evening—the buffet changes daily—there is a selection of pakoras of potato, spinach, onion and eggplant; beef kofta (clove-imbued meatballs in a spicy sauce); arbi (crescents of taro, like a potato in texture, but with much more flavour); Navrattan korma curry (a sweet and rich dish of mushrooms and mixed veg in cream); vegetables Jalfrazi (another sweetish dish of green and yellow beans); and the Edmonton favourite, butter chicken, whose flavour is less sweet here than that in other restaurants, and far more assertive.

For the à la carte portion of the evening, I have my favourite go-to, bhaigan bartha (\$13), a slow-simmered dish of smoked eggplant, green peas, onions, tomatoes and ginger, along with the dose of the classic seasoning, garam masala. This is the ideal dish for naan dipping, and Origin India's version has texture to it, not mush, and is heart-healthily low on the ghee front (ie melted butter).

Another favourite is Karahi paneer (\$15), a dish of homemade softened cottage cheese with green peppers, black mustard seed and spiced tomato sauce—or "gravy" in the parlance of Indian chefs. There is a nice blend of onions here, with finely chopped and well-sweated jewels providing the flavour base for the dish, and larger sautéed pieces adding sweetness.



Again, a clove undertone and the fresh julienned ginger drive the flavours directly to the palate ... and up your nose if you're not careful.

Finally, chicken biryani (\$16), a densely flavoured rice dish that is the essence of rice cookery. The flavours are dark in this dish, made of basmati from the Deccan Plateau near Hyderabad. Sawhney offers kachumbar, a bowl of fresh vegetables to lift the palate. This falls under the rubric of pickles, and it is utter simplicity and brilliance, really: finely diced onions, tomato, and cucumber. A squeeze of

lemon over top, and you have crunch, spice and sweetness in one mouthful.

My advice would be to try the buffet for a visit, just to see what you can see. The spicing there is below medium, so you won't hurt yourself, if you're a first-timer. Indeed, medium should be as hot as you want to go, so that you can taste the food and the spicing without the threat of tastebud overload. Indian food, after all, is not a test for those wanting to be tortured. It is complex and utterly beguiling, and that's why on your next trip, you should move directly to the menu. ▽

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Christmas controller

JAN HOSTYN / jan@vuwweekly.com

If you watch a movie every once in a while, or haven't quite figured out where the mute button on your TV remote is, no doubt you've been inundated with magical portraits of Christmas. You know the kind—perfect presents, glittering outfits, happy and smiling families and not a single whiff of a burnt cookie anywhere.

But, in my world anyways, dysfunctional families and compromised culinary skills quickly get in the way and perfection melts away into chaos.

So this year, how about striving for a little bit of controlled chaos? Toss away all those extreme expectations that we can and should do it all—cook, bake, entertain, wrap, decorate and smile rapturously, all at the same time—and get some help. There's plenty of it out there. Of course, it all comes with a cost, but doesn't everything?

What can you do without? How about slaving away in the kitchen for days on end for that little (or big) get-together that you want to have. Get it catered instead. And by catered I don't mean ordering a bunch of pizzas and calling it a day—although that works too, you might want to go for something a little more inspired.

First you have to decide whether you want more of a casual dinner, an elaborate sit-down affair or the popular nibbling-and-mingling hors d'oeuvres-type gathering. Even within those options you have choices—are you going to pick up the food or have it delivered, is it going to be made in your home courtesy of a real chef or are you going to be warming it up?

One of the more inexpensive options would probably technically fall under the category of take-out but, if you are going to do take-out, you can at least make it decent take-out. **Mexico Lindo**, a little family-run restaurant in the west end, has a whole cooler full of authentic Mexican food that simply needs to be brought home and reheated.

Huge burritos stuffed with rice, black beans and chicken or beef are \$4.25, and 3 tamales—corn dough filled with either shredded pork and green salsa or feta cheese and red salsa—are \$4.50. And that's just a start. Add some of their homemade tortilla chips and one (or more) of their salsas and you're all set for an easy, casual get-together.

For a more elegant sit-down dinner, **Upper Crust Café** offers some traditional holiday choices—turkey, roast pork loin, beef tenderloin or tourtière—complete with assorted yummy sides like grilled vegetables and mashed potatoes—for

CATERING

between \$15.95 and \$17.95 per person.

IF YOU HAPPEN to be blessed with an unlimited budget you may want to go all-out with an elaborate, multi-course dinner from **Bridges Catering**. Ease into it with a fresh asparagus and brie soup topped with herbed croutons (\$7.50 per person) and some baby greens with dried apples, cranberries, apricots and nuts with a raspberry vinaigrette dressing (\$7.00 per person). Then, once your appetite has been properly piqued, you can dig into your entrée—perhaps some Atlantic salmon wrapped in a corn husk with fresh dill butter (\$18.00 per person) or Alberta pork loin stuffed with figs, dates, apricots and cranberries and glazed with Canadian maple rum sauce (\$16.00 per person). And since dessert is a must, crème caramel served with a chocolate dipped strawberry (\$7.00 per person) would nicely fill any remaining crevices.

As yummy as all that sounds, you don't have to host an intricate event in order to eat well. Do away with the chairs and the formality and serve hors d'oeuvres or appetizers. People get to mingle and eat, and there's less danger of getting stuck next to the resident bore for an entire long, drawn-out dinner.

The Runaway Spoon Catering Company offers a whole range of options that would work for just about anything. For \$1.75 each, you can munch on delicacies such as chorizo skewers, shrimp and lime mini quiche and corn fritter dumplings. Or spend \$2.25 each and get assorted California sushi, thai beef cucumber cups or prosciutto and ricotta phyllo. And again, you can't forget dessert. Tangy lemon tarts, mini apple cranberry spice cakes, fudge brownies and butter tarts will all do a stellar job of tempting your guests (2 for \$2.25).

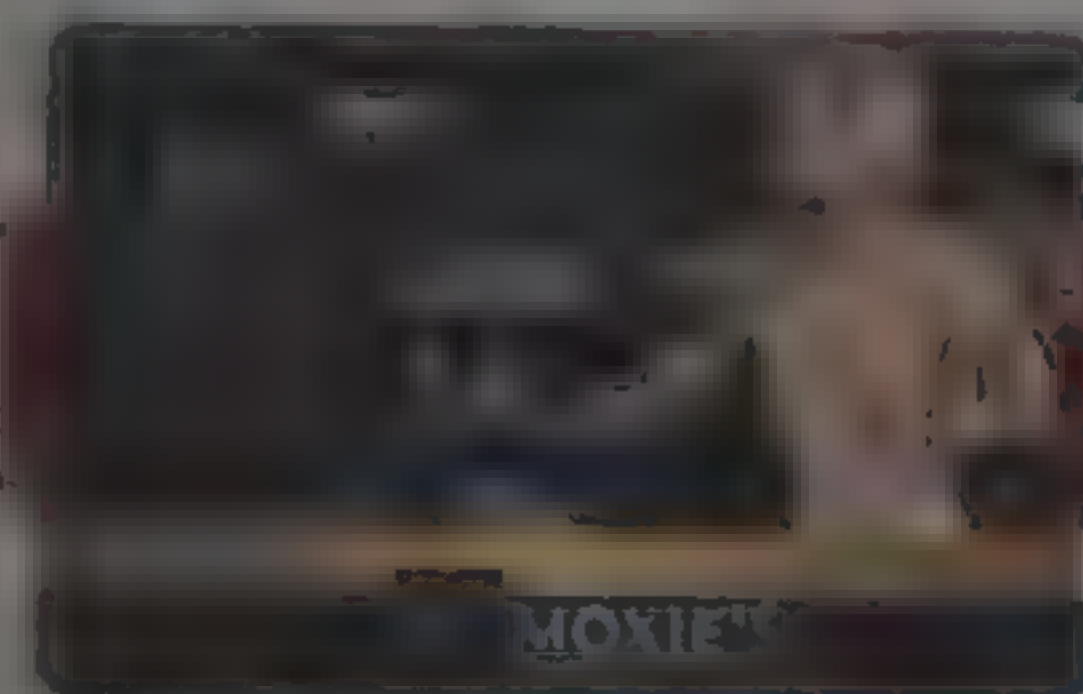
This is just a small taste of the choices available. Chances are your favourite restaurant might even cater. It just depends on what you're looking for and what you're willing to pay—but there's something out there for everyone.

So, no, getting your little get-together or huge function catered won't quash your brother Bill's over-inflated ego or your aunt Mildred's penchant for releasing frequent and exuberant bodily noises. But it will help control the chaos, if only a tiny bit. And every little bit counts. ▼

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SUBS **GREAT HEAD**
JASON FOSTER
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When a young man wants to woo a woman, he probably thinks about giving her flowers, chocolate or wine. Understandable. These are things that women often appreciate. But how about beer?

Stop your laughter; this isn't the 1970s. Beer has grown up. Many women are exploring the world of beer and its various pleasures. And I have some evidence to prove it.

A few weeks ago, I attended Edmonton's first ever beer-tasting speed-dating evening. (I hasten to add I was there as an observer only—I suspect my spouse might have had something to say about any full participation.) It is a combination of beer appreciation and rapid-fire singles mixing, something that would not have occurred a few years ago.

Speed dating is the growing phenomenon of organized meet-and-chats. The goal is to allow singles to meet a number of prospective dates in a single evening, through a process of rotating short conversations. At the end of the night, participants mark a box for each person they met—yes if they want to see them again, no if they don't. The host goes through the answers and forwards contact information if both people said yes.

The beer evening was sponsored by Fast Life—a national speed dating company that organizes regular speed dating events in town. They hosted it at the Oliver Square Brewster's Brewpub. Why were they inspired to launch a beer tasting evening for their speed daters?

"Men love beer. Men love women. Men love women who love beer. Simple" says Fast Life's Emily Nutting, the organizer of the evening.

Sure, but it seems to me one of the problems would be that a beer tasting would attract many men and far fewer women, which is not so conducive to pairing up. It turns out women were interested. The evening had 10 women and 12 men who were willing to pay \$80 for some free beer samples and an evening of speed dates. Most appeared to be professionals with stable careers. The age range was between the mid-20s and mid-30s—a group no longer interested in the club scene and who might find it difficult to find opportunities to meet other singles. Some had done speed dating before, but most I chatted with were trying it for the first time.

As it turns out most were not beer geeks by any stretch, but most had an appreciation for beer. "I like beer. Nothing too dark or heavy, but I like the flavour," according to Marianna (*like all the names in this story, this one isn't*

real—Ed). The beer adds a curiosity factor they suggested.

"Beer seems more relaxed and casual than wine," said Erica, who had tried speed dating before. "It is easier to get to know someone over beer, rather than a more uppity wine thing."

For the guys, it seemed like the perfect combo. "If she likes beer herself, she won't mind when I have a couple myself, or go out for a few beers. It makes it easier," suggested Mario. Paul agreed but kept his eye on the real point. "Having a girl like beer is great, but if she is interesting and we hit it off, I am not that concerned. Beer is just a bonus."

The evening began with a short lecture from the Brewster's beer expert about beer and the range of tastes and flavours found in beer. Brewster's put up seven of their own beers for the tasting, ranging from their light blueberry wheat ale (a favourite with the women) to their remarkable hefeweizen and even a sample of their 9% barley wine. The barley wine may not have been the best choice, as few of the participants liked this challenging, strong beer.

The first sample was poured and the speed dating began. The dates were eight minutes long, and the couples chatted about themselves as they sipped beer. The bell rang and the rotation began—women stayed in place and the men moved to the next table. Every second or third date a new beer would be served to freshen both the palate and the conversation.

At the halfway point, the group took a break, giving me an opportunity to ask how it was going. Most reported having an enjoyable time and indicated the beer was a minor, but important part of the dates.

"We didn't talk about beer much, but it was a nice fall back when the conversation lagged," said Marianna.

It seems the beer served as a reliable ice-breaker, allowing for some initial small talk. "We might talk about whether we liked the beer just served, which sometimes led to a short discussion of what kind of beer we like," said Scott.

But when you only have eight minutes, you got to get to more important matters quickly, so beer was dropped in short order.

Did love bubble up like a frothy head on a well-poured pint. It's too hard to tell in just one night. What we did learn, however is that beer can offer a complementary backdrop to the speed dating scene—relaxed and comfortable.

The evening suggests to me that beer is growing up in the eyes of many. The reputation of beer has become more classy and reputable, allowing it to serve a role previously reserved for wine or food. Professionals can admit they enjoy beer without it being a date-killer. In part this is due to the increased range of styles and flavours in beer, which make it more accessible to women. But it is also a long overdue recognition that beer is a pliable, flexible beverage that can fit many occasions.

Really, if beer can find you love, what can't it do? ♥

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Beyond the buffet

SHARON YEO / sharon@vancouverweekly.com

Arvind Sawhney thinks Edmonton is ready for a new kind of Indian culinary experience. The owner of Origin India, the newest addition to Whyte Avenue's bustling restaurant scene, is trying to promote a different approach to the food he grew up eating.

"I did not want to build a traditional Indian restaurant," he says. "Obviously I'm going to provide traditional Indian food, but I wanted to provide a very pleasant, very warm ambiance in the restaurant." Given that Sawhney is new to the industry (he was looking for something different after working as a mechanical engineer for 20 years), many of his decisions have been guided by his own experiences as a patron.

"I'm a diner," he says. "I eat out a lot, I know exactly what to expect."

As Sawhney's close friend Raj Sharma of Maurya Palace recruited him to run Origin India, the restaurant is somewhat influenced by its sister connection (notably in the kitchen, as the head chef was transferred from Maurya Palace). However, Sawhney emphasizes that he had a very clear vision for the restaurant, starting with the food.

Sawhney noticed the explosion of Indian restaurants in the city, and in particular, Indian buffets, in the last three years. But having unlimited access to a dozen dishes is not how Sawhney, who immigrated to Canada from India 28 years ago, would choose to promote the intricate flavours of his native cuisine. "It's just like pouring six different wines in the same glass and trying to tell me what you're drinking," he says. "If you personally want to enjoy an Indian meal, instead of having seven or eight or 10 different curries which all do taste different ... have just one or two."

Edmonton's appetite for buffets made incorporating one a financial necessity for the restaurant, but Sawhney made some distinct choices to set Origin India apart from competitors. For

PROFILE

ARVIND SAWHNEY
ORIGIN INDIA
(780) 436-0558

one, acknowledging that "most Indian cuisine out there is quite heavy," Sawhney saw to it that his kitchen was lighter on the use of both oils and creams

IN ADDITION, Sawhney is keen to introduce diners to Indian appetizers. "If you ever have gone to a formal Indian get-together," he says, "our hors d'oeuvre or appetizers are the biggest part of the meal, the best part of the meal, and the healthier part of the meal. Unless you're getting involved in samosas and all that deep-fried stuff, you can go for Tandoori cuisine which is all done in the oven with marinades [that] are pretty light."

Although Origin India has been open for just two months, Sawhney says that he is encouraged by the number of regular customers he sees returning through the door. He is focused on providing patrons with good service and a consistent product, but is also ready to cater to those looking for something more specific. "Yes, we have a menu," he says, "but it is not written in stone. If someone walks in here and knows Indian food and wants something different done, obviously we can do it to please their palate."

Sawhney is also looking to expand the reach of Origin India in the new year by appealing to those in the area who are in search of a "quick fix." Built with a take-out kitchen at the forefront of the space, the restaurant hopes to offer two or three high-quality wraps that contain the "flavour of India and the curry taste that people have fallen in love with."

With Sawhney's determination, it may only be a matter of time until Edmonton embraces Origin India, and realizes that there is more to Indian cuisine than buffets and beer pairings. ▼



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Back to the future

Eighty years, same great snow at Sunshine

HART GOLBECK / hart@vuvweekly.com

It's a little known fact that the leasehold where Sunshine Village currently sits, not to mention most of the Canadian Rockies, was almost annexed by the US. It was the 1850's and the Minnesota state senate passed a motion to lay claim to most of Saskatchewan, Alberta and BC. Fortunately the usurpers got distracted by the Civil War, giving Canada a chance to push the railroad west and through the Rockies. But had things gone differently, a visit to one of Alberta's favourite mountain playgrounds might have required a passport.

A couple weeks ago, I made yet another pilgrimage to one of my favoured stomping grounds of the last 30 years. Aside from enjoying the best early season conditions in the Rockies, I had an opportunity to partake in a historical presentation by David Finch, part of Sunshine Village's 80th anniversary season festivities. The celebrations culminate in a big birthday party at the end of December, complete with a giant birthday cake. Between the history and the snow it was a momentous opening to the season, in keeping with the resort's storied past.

The railroad was Sunshine's early lifeline. By 1883, it had reached Siding 29, later known as Banff. Log cabins and hotels were built and tourists descended, drawn by the newly discovered hot springs and the sheer beauty of the land. In 1885 the area

SUNSHINE

became a National Park. For many years it was only a summer destination and windows were boarded up for the winter. Wilderness cabins were built and guides would take hikers into to Mt Assiniboine and Sunshine Meadow.

In March of 1929, Cliff White and Cyril Paris strapped on touring skis and made the first pass through Sunshine Meadows. The snow was so deep they had to dig down to get the cabin door open. They returned to Banff and told the locals of their great adventure. Two years later in 1931, Jim Brewster, owner of Brewster Transportation Company, set out with his wife, brother and friends to search out this area for the purpose of building a ski hill. They found it and by 1936 had purchased the cabin and its National Park lease from the Canadian Pacific Railroad for \$300. Buses were used to bring guests up the winding dirt road.

The first permanent tow rope lift was installed in 1945. The National Park board was not too happy about the lift and this sentiment would prevail for every lift installed thereafter. Sunshine really made headlines in 1961 when the Wawa T-Bar was installed. This was the first high capacity lift in the area and it doubled the capacity of the Brewster buses. In the next 20 years ownership changed several times and many more lifts



were added as each new owner would start with upgrades.

I STARTED SKIING these slopes in the late '70s and even have pictures of my friends and me sitting on the 50th anniversary cake. Back then we would have to pile into Brewster buses and wind our way up what's now known as the ski out. As an executive of the Mountain Rider Ski Club the challenge was always getting three tour buses to the base, then unloading and cramming into the ever aging shuttle buses. If I remember correctly, this trip was made much more tolerable by the existence of wineskins.

Finally in 1980 the \$12-million gondola was built, eliminating the need for busing. In 1981, the Scurfield family bought the resort and to this day they

continue to develop the terrain. They have converted all the lifts to quads and in 2001, the aging high-maintenance gondola was replaced by a new high-speed large-cabin gondola.

Their latest project is the upgrade of the Sunshine Lodge, formerly the Sunshine Inn. The main building has been completely renovated with modern rooms, lounges and fine dining. The terrace wing has been demolished with only new concrete footings visible where 30 luxury hotel rooms will be erected for next season. The next time you're up, have a look at the log building connected to Mad Trapper's Saloon. That's part of the old cabin that still stands today.

Through the years Sunshine has had a couple of major events that nearly removed it from the landscape. In the

early '60s, plans were developed for a major highway to connect Banff to BC. The new design went directly through the village. Later in the '80s federal minister Sheila Copps threatened to remove all ski hills from the parks. Thankfully both plans were shelved.

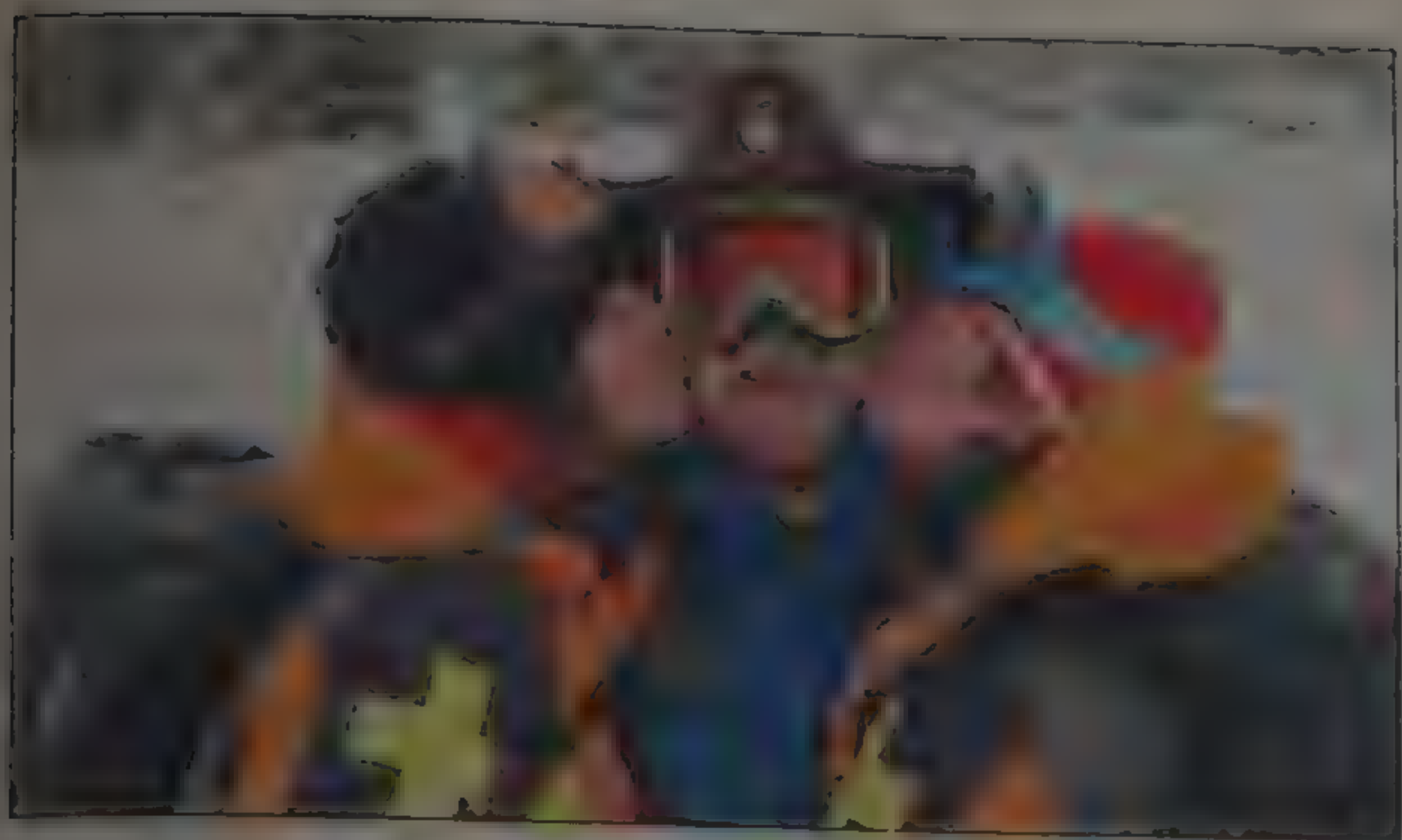
Early this season, Sunshine was one of the few resorts in the Rockies with suitable early season snow conditions. I can attest to this, having spent a recent Saturday afternoon with my wife, sitting out a white-out type blizzard in the warm confines of the on-hill hot tub after getting first turns on some pretty sweet corduroy. Conditions have even improved since then because all 12 of their lifts are running.

I'm thinking White and Paris did really well when they first scouted out this location. ▽




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The Mad Trapper rides again

HART GOLBECK / hart@vancouverweekly.com

Ever wonder why the slope-side bar at Sunshine Village is called Mad Trapper's? It's named after the mad trapper himself, Jerry Kernen. Jerry has been around for eons and even now at 91 years old he continues to cruise the slopes at Sunshine at least 50 times a season. What's really amazing is to celebrate his birthday he's dropped into Delirium Dive each of the past three seasons and on February 14 he'll be at it again in celebration of his 92nd. It is a much watched event as he tackles these challenging cliffs accompanied by a couple of seasoned pro-patrollers.

Jerry grew up as a trapper in Saskatchewan and on the Saloon wall you can find a picture of him in his younger days, brandishing sidearms. Apparently these guns came in handy on several occasions when he was forced to put down an attacking bear or two. Soon he was attracted to the adventure of skiing and in the winter he would hit the slopes of Sunshine, first as a ski patroller, after which he

RIDE **HARDCORE**

moved into marketing and finally as a ski ambassador

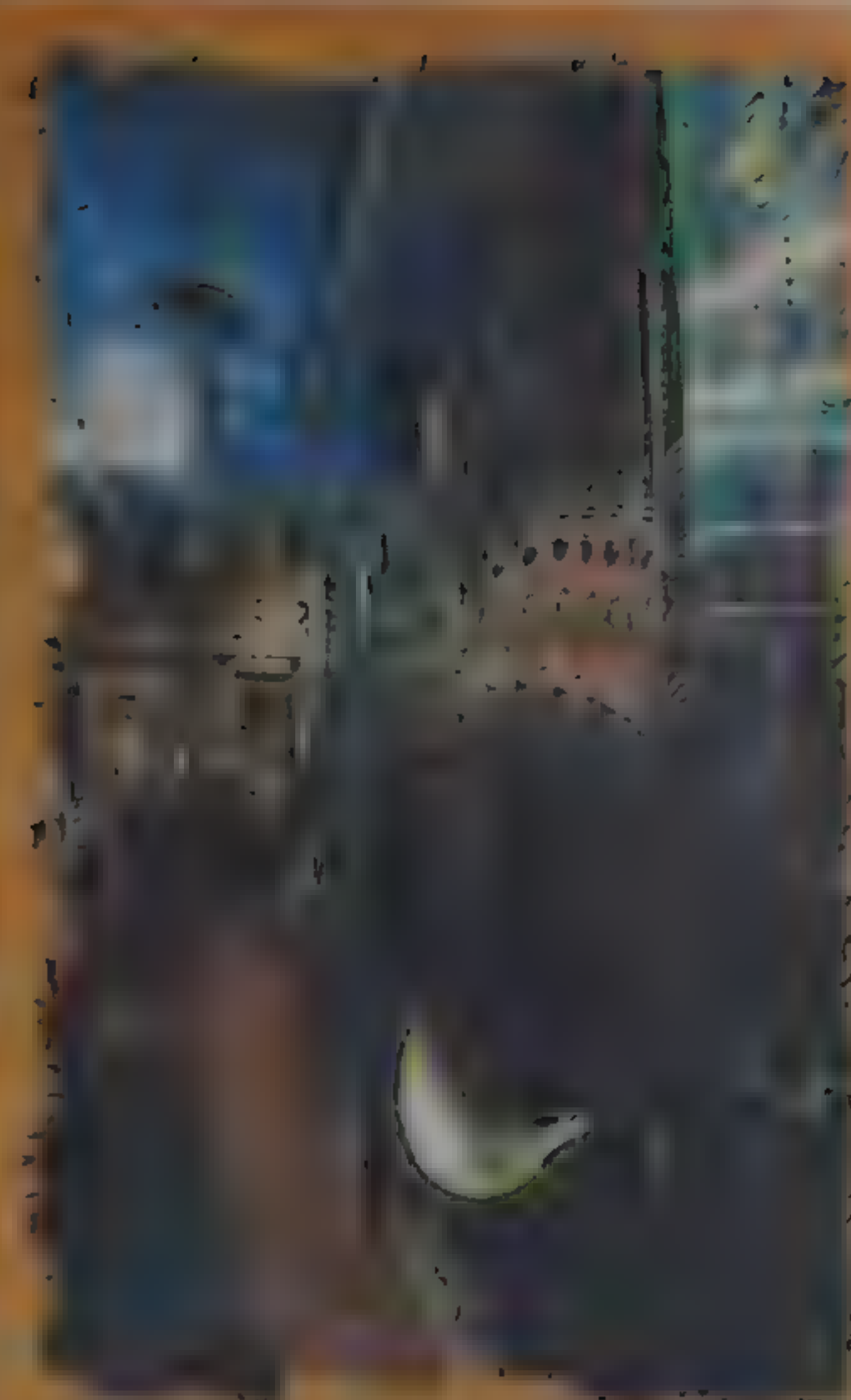
Hard to believe but his current summer hobbies are speedboats and motorcycles. Unlike many older skiers, Jerry keeps up with technology and usually upgrades to the latest equipment. I'm guessing he should get some pretty good deals considering the free publicity ski makers could get in return.

My favourite quote from Jerry is his take on the ever changing skier: "I think the skiers were a bit crazier in the old days. A lot of people used to smoke marijuana. They'd go into the trees and you'd ski by and you could smell it. Now, everybody is good." Jerry himself has never smoked and he gets by on a single pint of beer every afternoon in his saloon. You can't miss him, just look for the old guy surrounded by all the younger women. ▼



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Tracing a *Fine Line* in the snow

JEREMY DERKSEN / snowzone@vancouverweekly.com

Here's a test for the self-proclaimed hardcore rider: Climb to the highest peak you can find, accented with pencil-thin spines, death-defying chutes, a beckoning 40-degree slope and three days' accumulation of dry champagne. Stare down at the line of a lifetime. Then finish this well known phrase: "nsk and ..."

If you said reward, you're not wrong. But that's only half the equation. The other half, the one most of us forget, is "consequence." As skiers and riders, epic conditions can easily blind us to danger. It tends to fall outside the lens, unless that lens belongs to the Rocky Mountain Sherpas.

AVI SAFETY

The Vancouver-based ski-film company has just released *The Fine Line*, a hybrid shred/education film on avalanche awareness. Where most films focus on athletes' performances, it pans wide to capture the potentially fatal consequences of going into the backcountry ignorant and unprepared. Unfortunately, those consequences are all too familiar for the Sherpas.

In 1997, the founding members of RMS lost four friends to an avalanche. "At the time, we skied the backcountry

with no clue, no idea," recounts Malcolm Sangster, RMS co-founder and producer. "We got away with it but over the years we've seen the same types of accidents happen. Dave [Mossop] and I were out the day the Strathcona-Tweedsmuir avalanche went down in Roger's Pass. Making ski films and seeing what was on the market, we said, 'We've got to make something that's going to speak to these kids.'"

The film comes at a time when the popularity of big mountain riding is rapidly escalating, largely due to a growing ski-porn industry. Pick up *Powder* magazine, watch the latest Matchstick or TGR production or surf over to biglines.com and it's everywhere.

"With technology, easier access with snowmobiles and resorts and the push in the media, it's definitely drawing more people to the backcountry," says Sangster. "Some are experienced enough to manage the risks but a lot aren't."

A lot of films portray avalanches in a weird way. You see them happen but you never see the aftermath, what

led up to it or what went wrong."

IN A FEW SECONDS after a massive slide, pro skier Dan Treadway is desperately gunning his sled. The camera is somewhere on his body, offering a perfect, vicarious vantage point. As the snow rushes towards him Treadway's head swivels. Despite a full-face helmet, fear is evident in his body language. It's as if you're sitting on the back of the sled watching as the billowing white mass envelops him, one of several bone-chilling moments in the film.

Other footage shows pro riders fighting madly to stay above slab releases. Some miraculously get out in time. Others are swept over jagged cliffs and washed under a tidal wave of suffocating snow.

Just when the foreboding menace reaches a feverish threshold, the film does a 180. All of a sudden, Tanner Hall or Travis Rice is pounding a pillow line through a long, drawn-out tree run. Erik Hjordleifson or Sean Pettit emerges in slo-mo through a powder cloud, ripping past the camera to jib a downed pine.

And then, Dana Flahr rips an incredible line: a headcam view of skis pointing down an impossible spine, the snow impervious to interpretation by any but the best. Flahr picks up speed, making split-second decisions on a hairline ridge with no room for miscalculation, dropping over one cliff onto the next, carving swaths into deep, untracked ecstasy.

This is ski porn in all its glory yet it doesn't come off as gratuitous. It emphasizes the point: safe backcountry

riding versus unsafe, reward versus consequence. "We just want people to know there is a time and place you can go after these dream lines in the backcountry," Sangster says, "but knowing when is super important."

At Whistler, Sangster is just getting off the hill when I reach him on his cell. These days he's busy managing promotional efforts for *The Fine Line*—mass mailing DVDs, coordinating film festival appearances, working on putting together a high school educational tour and doing interviews, all the while pursuing new ventures with the crew.

Pressed for time, many of us might conduct our business by cellphone while driving. Not Sangster; he recognizes a stupid risk when he sees it. We reschedule for later in the evening.

At 9 am, he's back in Vancouver working into the night. Unlike the Sea-to-Sky, he figures he can drive his laptop while talking so he pulls a power cord into a back office, away from the low din of the RMS crew assembling DVD packages. Currently *The Fine Line* is touring with the Banff Mountain Film Festival and getting good coverage in major media, but it all grew from humble beginnings.

"We got started about eight years ago under the table, going out on our own dime and our own time," Sangster recalls. "We're a pretty new company. The main thing for us was to try to get the film out to different venues. We're a fairly small marketing machine."

Things are changing with the success of this film. As Sangster sees it,

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CHRISTIE SCHULTZ
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As welcome as a mild autumn may seem at first, cross-country ski enthusiasts were quick to wax longingly about the early arrival of local tracks last season in comparison with the dry cold that tormented us into this December. With reports of snow falling nearly everywhere else, I wondered more seriously about out-of-town nordic skiing adventures and communities.

To get an expert perspective on the question I connected with Sean Rickard, vice president of Edmonton Nordic. In addition to travelling for better snow and better tracks, Rickard suggested that a good reason to consider skiing trails elsewhere in the region is that terrain has considerable impact on the skiing experience: "Skiing away from home allows you access to [different terrain]. For example, the rolling terrain of Blackfoot Provincial Recreation Area, about 50 kilometres from Edmonton, or the short, sharp hills of the Canmore Nordic Centre."

For the resort experience, one needs to go further afield. Rickard notes, "many major downhill ski resorts have nordic trails nearby." There are some that stand out in this regard. "Perhaps

the best of these would be Silver Star, near Vernon, BC," he adds. It has its own trail system, which connects to the Sovereign Lake Nordic Centre. The Canmore Nordic Centre has a high profile and excellent trails, and the proximity of the town means that it is also a realistic resort alternative.

Rob Bernhardt, president of BC Nordic, also had some choice advice for me. He suggested a few more nordic ski locations in BC located very close to alpine resorts. "Sun Peaks Resort offers exceptional nordic skiing trails and facilities. Near the Alberta border, Dawn Mountain Nordic Trails are situated at the base of Kicking Horse Mountain Resort, offering both beautifully groomed trails, stunning views and wilderness near the amenities of a resort. It simply doesn't get any better."

Bernhardt is quick to mention that the province is known for its wide range of landscapes, mountain regions and terrain which provides incredibly diverse nordic skiing experiences. As he says, "there literally is something for everyone." There's everything from skiing at the Hills Health Ranch near 100 Mile House for more of a ranch-style experience, to Larch Hills in the Shuswap region, known for its typical mild temperatures and abundance of dry powder snow.

"Or ski like an Olympian at the Whistler Olympic Park in the Callaghan Valley, south of Whistler," suggests Bern-

hardt. "With 50 km of groomed and track-set trails, it's a great destination for skiers of all levels. It's a real thrill to ski where the best in the world will compete in 2010."

Both Bernhardt and Rickard mention Nipika Mountain Resort as a top spot near the Alberta-BC border where you can immerse yourself cross-country skiing and staying at a place that operates completely off the grid. Nipika is an eco-resort that generates all its own power. For more on everything BC nordic, visit bcnordic.com. Practice before your trip with the help of edmontonnordic.ca.

I still think that skiing locally is one of the best reasons to try and fall in love with cross-country skiing, but getting out and about with the nordic skis can be an exceptional way to explore the terrain and the winter wilds away from home, even after the snow has fallen here.

As one colleague, Dianne Chisholm, puts it, "Away from or close to home, nordic skiing deranges and excites the work-a-day soul, displacing sedentary habits with bold, fresh, blood-pumping, breath-taking turns, sweeps and edges. Open snow-covered terrain compels outgoingness, and with outgoingness come horizons towards which one is hurled, giddy with rebirth."

And with that, I'll leave you to put on your ski boots. ▽

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CONDITIONS REPORT

Local

Rabbit Hill — 30cm base, 5cm of new snow. 5 lifts and 6 runs open.
 Snow Valley — 30cm base, 3cm of new snow. All lifts and most runs now open.
 Sun Ridge — 40cm base, no new snow. 5 lifts and 7 runs open.
 Edmonton Ski Club — Open.

Alberta

Canada Olympic Park — 20cm base, 3 lifts and 8 runs open.
 Castle Mountain — 28-49cm base, 42cm of new snow.
 Lake Louise — 108-133cm base, 18cm of new snow. 8 lifts and 95 runs open.
 Marmot Basin — 25cm base, 5cm of new snow. 5 lifts and 46 runs open.
 Mt. Norquay — 80cm base, 14cm of new snow. 4 lifts and 16 runs open.
 Nakiska — 17-55cm base, 22cm of new snow. 4 lifts and 9 runs open.
 Sunshine Village — 99cm base, 10cm of new snow. 12 lifts and 89 runs open.
 Tawatinaw — Open soon.

B.C.

Apex — 80cm base, 39cm of new snow. 2 lifts and 2 runs open.
 Big White — Open Dec 19.
 Fernie — 41-43cm base, 8cm of new snow. 3 lifts and 11 runs open.
 Kicking Horse — 99cm base, 26cm of new snow.
 Kimberley — Open Dec 19.
 Mt. Washington — Open Dec 19.
 Panorama — 22-62cm base, 19cm of new snow. 7 lifts and 20 runs open.
 Powder King — 109-136cm base, 4cm of new snow.
 Red Mountain — Open Dec 19.
 Revelstoke — 118cm base, 24cm of new snow.
 Silver Star — 85-112cm base, 49cm of new snow. 10 lifts and 87 runs open.
 Sun Peaks — 65-88cm base, 31cm of new snow. 9 lifts and 53 runs open.
 Whistler/Blackcomb — 62cm base, 17cm of new snow.
 White Water — 75cm base, 3cm of new snow.

U.S.A.

48 North — 25-30cm base. 2 lifts and 10 runs open.
 Big Sky — 61-91cm base, 5cm of new snow.
 Crystal Mountain — 111cm base, 6 lifts and 33 runs open.
 Great Divide — 30-61cm base. 2 lifts and 24 runs open.
 Lookout Pass — 40-71cm base, 3cm of new snow. 15 runs open.
 Mt. Spokane — Open Dec 19.
 Schweitzer Mt. — 13-86cm. 1 lift and 3 runs open.
 Silver Mt. Resort — 43-68cm base. 3 runs open.
 Sun Valley — 40cm base. 4 lifts and 26 runs open.

*Opening dates can change depending on weather conditions.

All conditions accurate as of Dec 17, 2008.

Get up to date conditions, easy to search @ vuweekly.com

SAFETY

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 20

the advantages of having the film on the Banff world tour circuit and getting coverage in magazines like *Powder* is that it will open doors for new projects. "We have some other environmental and educational things we want to do down the line," he says. "We're ecstatic that this project has put us on the map a little more."

ANOTHER SCENE — The film—lapsed for effect—shows hundreds of riders climbing into Spanky's Ladder, a backcountry area off of Blackcomb mountain. It jarred me when I realized that, like the untold others streaming over those cliffs, I hadn't even considered the risk the first time I'd gone in.

After watching a segment on slope aspect, I was reminded of another occasion. A few years back a couple friends and I visited Kicking Horse for a lift-assisted, backcountry powder weekend. We'd just skied a pristine convex slope in knee-deep powder, a cocktail of euphoria and adrenalin coursing through our bloodstream.

Up above another skier dropped in. He skied up to our celebratory party, dispensing with introduction to get straight to the point. "What are you guys doing in here without beacons or rescue gear?" he asked, shocked and clearly annoyed. The high faded; we had no good answer.

Like a lot of skiers, we got lucky. We saw the big lines and went after them, not thinking about the fact that outside the resort boundaries, you're alone. It's different for the pros and the big film companies.

Obviously RMS wasn't going to put people's lives at risk to get slide footage. Most of it came from other production companies like TGR, Frontier Films and National Geographic. As Sangster points out, the circumstances in those cases were different than they are for the amateur.

"Everyone was OK in those slides. They always have guides in heli-ops

and everyone's well-taken care of," Sangster says. Even then, things can still go wrong. "The snowmobile one is fairly famous. That was Dan Treadway. He was fully passed out, no pulse, nothing; they pounded him in the chest when they dug him out and he came back."

Lucky

FOR MOST OF US, snow is benign and unthreatening. Until we step into the backcountry, we're sheltered from it by modern convenience and avalanche control efforts largely unnoticed. Maybe that's why, like kids who have never seen where their food comes from, our understanding of snow is disconnected from its reality beyond our metaphorical plates.

Avalanche survivors know better. Several of them tell their stories in the film, recounting moments of horror as they lost control and were swept up in a slide surging with the force of a semi on the highway, as one survivor describes it. Broken legs, blood on the lungs, shock, fear, pain, suffocation; each tale unfolds against the backdrop of the mountains, casting the beauty and brute force of the terrain in sharp relief.

Throughout, the feature film stresses

that practical knowledge of avalanche bulletins, weather, terrain hazards, stability tests, safe travel and rescue is crucial. But it goes one step further. Following the main feature, the DVD contains four short educational films that serve as an introduction—or refresher—on essential snow skills and knowledge.

Since my earlier indiscretions, I've taken an introductory avalanche course at Whistler, practiced search and rescue in five years' patrolling at Marmot Basin and put my knowledge to the test in the Yoho backcountry. After all that, what I've learned is that I'm still a novice.

Kicking back after a day of skiing, I put on *The Fine Line* for a couple friends, one of whom happened to be an avalanche technician. As the training films rolled, he was glued. Conversation ensued about proper rescue techniques, point releases and close calls, and of the various experts in the film—basically a

"who's who" of the avalanche profession.

"The avalanche crew—the guides and the different heli operations—love it because they do all these avalanche courses and a lot of the films that are out there aren't that good. So they're happy to have something a little fresher," Sangster says.

In the end, it's all about changing the perception that big mountain riding is just a free for all. Behind every epic line on film, there are experts testing variables, checking conditions and plotting safe descents. There are risks and rewards, and there's a lot of great riding out there. But there are also stupid risks that can lead to permanent consequences.

At any given moment in the backcountry, the snow can give way. At the point of release you can often see a fine, razor sharp line. Sangster and the Sherpas know what's on both sides of that line, and this is their attempt to expose that to a wider audience. As exciting and fun as big mountain riding is, Sangster says, "there's a lot that goes into it."

You don't just go out there, hop on the biggest line and cowboy it. ▽



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Hey dude, park my car

FALL LINES

HART GOLBECK
 hart@vuweekly.com

SNOW ZONE
 HART GOLBECK / hart@vuweekly.com
 Parking has always been an issue at Alberta's big three resorts, Marmot Basin, Sunshine Village and Lake Louise. Considering that all three are located in a National Park with some pretty tight regulations you know there won't be much relief in sight as the season kicks into high gear. But with some simple strategies and smart choices you can avoid this common frustration.

Marmot Basin has the best set-up by far.

Its four tiered lots are ideal, staggered up the mountain beside the runs and serviced by a T-bar. Upon arrival you can stop for tickets or drop off any equipment renters at the base lodge and then drive up to any of the lots. I prefer number three and I like to arrive early so I can be within steps of the slopes.

Marmot's accessible lots are also a great place to get back to during the day to hydrate and have a lunch if you are travelling on a budget. These lots are especially popular in the spring, spawning small tailgate parties. Included in Marmot Basin's site guidelines are plans to upgrade the lots, including the relocation of the tour buses to lot number one, a move that would greatly alleviate overcrowding at the base lot.

At Sunshine Village, parking and getting to the slopes is more of a chore. On the weekends you'll find the main lot packed and cars parked for a kilometre or two down the access road. Sunshine shuttles will transport you to the gondola station but if you want to avoid the long walk, arriving before 8 am is a wise plan. This way you can take advantage of the resort's swanky coffee shop.

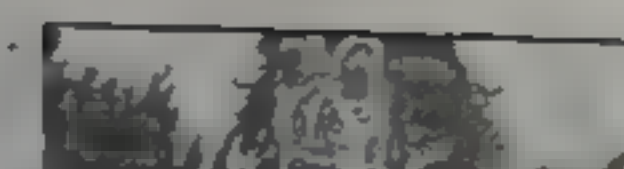
Lake Louise is not too bad. It has four lots spread across the base and on most days you can find a spot within a short hike. Like Sunshine, arriving earlier gets you much closer to the lodge. Of course, you can avoid all these hassles by taking a bus or hotel shuttle which will drop you at the door every time. ▽

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Big White

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 my mountain



ARTS

Improper Noun

Edmonton literary journal keeps its DIY spirit for its second issue

DAVID BERRY / david@vueweekly.com

Though self-effacement is always a security blanket, Marshall Watson seems to use it more to distract himself from a crushing workload than to protect a fragile ego. Watson, rakishly erect in a coffee shop lounge chair, has had a busy year: halfway through a Master's degree (a red-penned essay sits below his mug of tea, Watson using every spare moment he can), he's also found the time to work in two bands (My Robot Unicorn and Spreepark), pen a play based on the latter, help organize and perform in Exposure festival and, just recently, put out the second issue of *Here & Noun*, the literary journal he founded with two former classmates, Dave Hollingshead and Buffy Goodman.

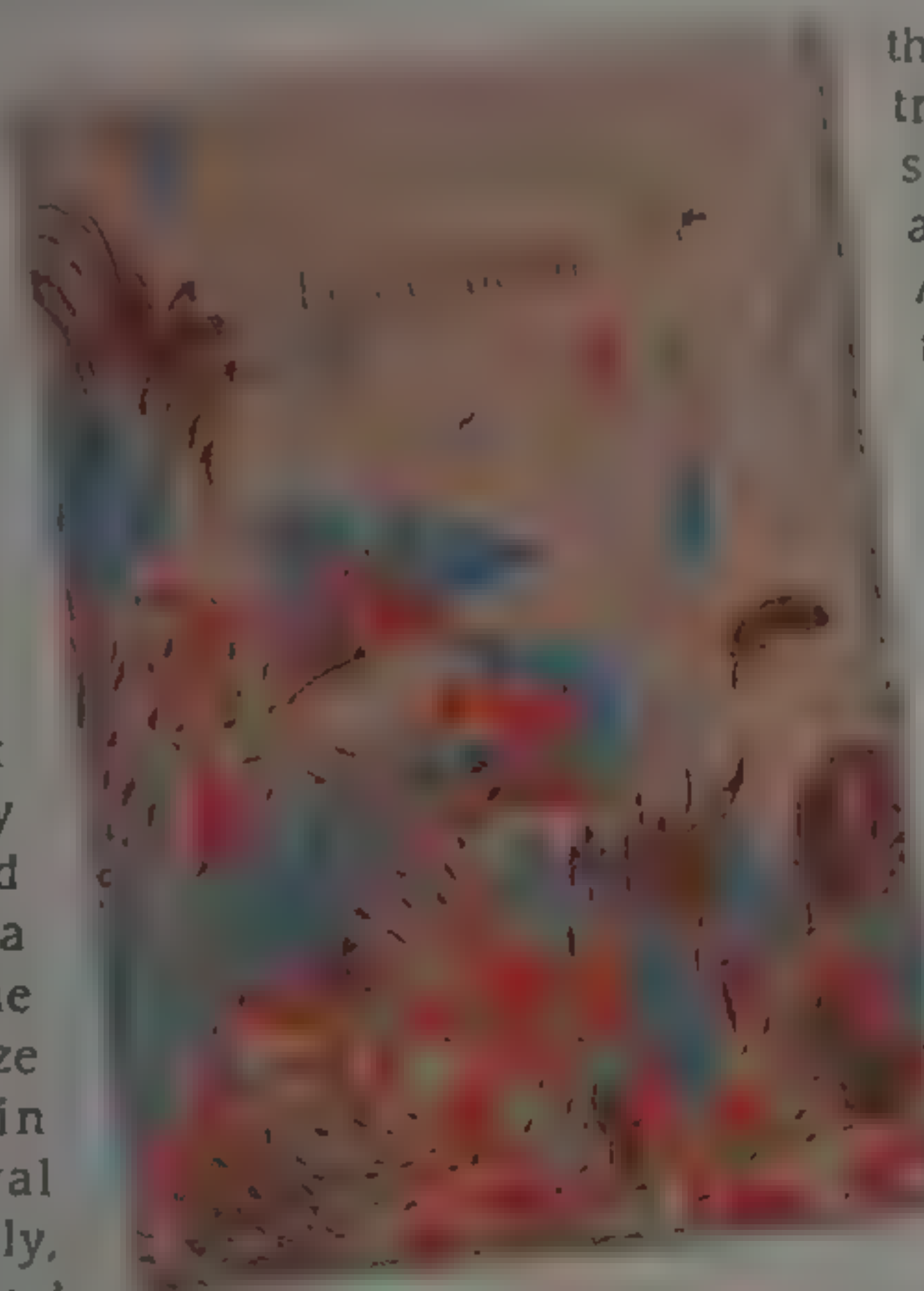
It's a schedule worthy of a breakdown, but Watson remains lithe and upbeat, in no small part due to the fact he appears to approach everything, his burgeoning journal included, with a bouyant excitement that has no room for self-seriousness.

"[*Here and Noun*] started the way most of the thing in my life start: as a pretentious pipe dream," he explains with arms and face in full animation. "Partly it was a self-indulgent way for us to get some cred—get published, make some money to make a bigger version—partly to rip off *McSweeney's* and partly to just help our friends, who we knew were doing good work but who didn't necessarily have the time or energy to send their stuff all over."

Pipe dream quickly turned to paper reality, quite literally for the trio: Watson, Hollingshead and Goodman put together each of the 150 issues in the first run by hand, from screening to printing, not to mention writing a few stories of their own, as well. Their work ethic paid off, though: the lot of them sold out within a few months, and word quickly spread. For the second issue,

JOURNAL

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they got more than triple the submissions from authors all over North America, a deluge that took them more than a year to sort out and put together for issue two

"I'm completely amazed by the interest in this," says Watson. "Part of it was just that we didn't want to expect too much, be too vain. But

people love it: I've

actually started selling them out of my backpack, because people are hounding me about it."

AND THOUGH they promised in the first issue that subsequent publishings would be erratic and entirely at the mercy of their whims, the response clearly has Watson and his partners encouraged. However, as they grow up and out, Watson explains that they hope to stick with the loose DIY spirit that has served them well thus far.

"We're not actually trying to guide the content in any direction," says Watson when asked about *Here & Noun's* intellectual foundations. "Reading it, I think you definitely get the sense it's a youthful publication. The first one was maybe a bit angsty and pretentious, and this one's youthfully fun and maybe exuberant even."

"It's kind of getting away from the canon," he continues, a fact evidenced as much in the writing as in the way it mixes media, including illustrations, comics and even a CD with the stories. "It's not reactionary in any sense, but we're definitely drawn to something that has a bit more energy, is a bit more experimental. Youthful isn't a perfect word, but ... yeah, I'll just say youthful." ▼

Melo-ing out

Walterdale takes an entertaining trip back to its melodramatic roots

XANTHE COUTURE / xanthe@vueweekly.com

Paying homage to one of the longest-running community theatres in Canada is the light-hearted and entertaining Walterdale Playhouse production of *Black Hearts in the Green Room*

As the characters on stage attempt to follow the grandiose and confused orders of drama queen director Ivana (Jeanie Timms), the rehearsals for their latest play, *Dark Deeds at the Red Ranch*, are constantly interrupted by strange supernatural happenings

Fittingly, *Black Hearts* is packed with larger-than-life characters whose exploits twist their way through the entire production. The simmering romance between the lead actors, the flighty Helen (Lindsey Lubkey) and the dashing Goodwin Grant (Richard LaRose) is constantly sabotaged while a chair on the set seems strangely weighted down as it is moved upstage and downstage and back again by overwrought stage hand Cassie, who is literally plastered with sticky notes

When ne'er-do-well Barnaby Badlington (Darrell Portz) arrives on the scene with his timid henchman, Harold Henschley (Tyler Goerz), and tells the community theatre actors he plans to convert the Walterdale into a

PREVIEW

UNTIL SAT, DEC 20
**BLACK HEARTS IN THE
GREEN ROOM**
DIRECTED BY TARA-LEE LAROSE
WRITTEN BY SCOTT SHARPLIN
STARRING JOHN FINNIE, DARRELL PORTZ
WALTERDALE PLAYHOUSE (10322 - 63 AVE),
\$12 \$16

furniture warehouse museum, the three ghosts Walt (John Finnie), Luna (Rhiannon Perly-Waugh) and Stella (Tara Koehler), typically a passive group of ghosts who enjoy watching the actors in rehearsals, decide to use their potential to stop Badlington from accomplishing his more sinister plan which they have overheard

Yet ghosts, like normal people, are not perfect, and their scheme to spook Badlington and warn the actors do not go to plan. Walt has a terrible tear of heights, which still plagues him in the afterlife, that winds up getting Stella and Luna exorcised and taken away by the Grim Reaper (Brian Arnold), who in a community theatre production also fittingly doubles as the assistant stage manager.

PLAYWRIGHT SCOTT SHARPLIN had hoped to bring the melodrama back from the shadows as one had not been performed at the Walterdale in 10 years, and *Black Hearts in the*

Green Room achieved just that. The audience was egged on from the very beginning to vocalize their opinions of the characters as the pianist Joanna (Jackie Lotery), dabbled the keys in accordance with the sinister, surprising or spooky developments on stage.

There was hissing and booing whenever the villainous Barnaby Badlington came on stage, there was the bellowing of laughter when one of the several scenes of physical comedy occurred and ooing and awing when the love sick stage hand Cassie (Katelyn Arthurs) and reformed bad guy Harold Henschley finally kissed.

All in all, *Black Hearts in the Green Room* is reminiscent of spending a much balmy summer night in the intimate setting of a Fringe production with no haughty theatre buffs around to beige up the atmosphere as the audience heckled to their hearts' content. After all, who needs an over-priced glass of Pinot at intermission and reserved behaviour when you can get a gangly fistful of liquorice for 50 cents and can heckle to your hearts content? ▼

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Debt becomes her

BOOKS HOPSCOTCH

JOSEF BRAUN

hopscotch@vancouverweekly.com

Margaret Atwood is nothing if not an irreverent polemicist. In the final days of a federal election so abysmally superfluous, inconsequential and lacking in dynamic options that fewer Canadians bothered to vote than during any previous election in history, Atwood announced her advocacy for the Bloc Québécois, a party that, should we need reminding, besides not actually appearing on the ballots of the vast majority of the country's ridings, including Atwood's, is fundamentally committed to removing the entire province of Quebec from Canada. The point? At least they gave a shit about the arts.

To be sure, as complimented by her intelligence, curiosity and wit, Atwood's irreverence is something to be grateful for. Her sounding off on whatever is a welcome element in our national discourse, her particular irreverence speaking to a healthy skepticism not only on the author's part but also on that of her readers, who are encouraged to consider the merits of each of Atwood's arguments and arrive at their own conclusion. This is especially the case with the eerily well-timed *Payback: Debt and the Shadow Side of Wealth* (House of Anansi, \$18.95), Atwood's contribution to the CBC Massey Lecture Series. It is a relatively slim volume, jam-packed with facts, proposals and surprising, insightful connections between extant myths and notions on its central topic. But if its final chapter feels a bit slight after all the hearty build-up, I think it's mainly because the ball has finally been tossed in our court. It's difficult to look at a ball just sitting there, inert and waiting to be picked up.

Payback goes way back. In searching for the origins of debt, of balances and exchanges, Atwood ultimately suggests that it may be primal, citing experiments on monkeys that reveal innate tendencies resembling credit and trade negotiations. With an inevitable emphasis on literary sources however—Atwood is above all a novelist and poet, and she's ever mindful of the practical uses of literature—she gets the best mileage out of the Devil and the myriad Faustus who've accepted his always popular buy-now, pay-later schemes over the years. Mephistopheles has a knack for bookkeeping, it would seem, and a dependence on the sort of binding legalities that's mystified everyone from illiterate farmers suffering a bad yield to gambling addicts on the lam to ordinary homebuyers from time immemorial. Debt requires an account, which is to say a narrative, and the accumulation of debt, Atwood posits, is so precariously seductive because it helps give our lives a story. Debt is drama. We are what we owe, and our stories are sometimes defined by the settling and unsettling of accounts. The great body of 19th century Western literature, as Atwood smartly observes, was always very much concerned with money and class, and in a memorable survey of some of its most famous protagonists Atwood declares that Emma Bovary in the end wasn't punished for sex but "shopaholicism."

IT'S IMPORTANT TO NOTE that exploring the idea of debt in stories, ones often featuring transactions involving spiritual, supernatural or in any case non-monetary properties, that money itself is never the real issue. Currency, as the "current" part of that word implies, is fluid and merely representational. Considerations of what items we place fundamental value on are thus duly approached, especially in the final, most problematic chapter, which finds a modern-day Ebenezer Scrooge realizing how closely his fortunes, both literal and figurative, are dependent on the dictates of environmental devastation. But Atwood's engagement with the more shaded characteristics of debt collectors and their clients reaches its most satisfying depths in her analysis of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, which takes into account religious and ethnic differences—Antonio, she points out, didn't charge interest on his loans not because he was a good guy but because as interest was actually outlawed at the time for Christians—and views Antonio and Shylock as uncomfortably codependent in the development of their own stories. Antonio "has projected onto Shylock—as his Shadow—the malice and the greediness that he himself possesses but can't acknowledge. He's made Shylock his whipping boy." It's a major highlight.

Looming over *Payback* is the question of debt as sin, and who of the two parties it requires is the more sinful. I'm not sure this is resolved, but the question is most interestingly complicated by Atwood's discussion of sin eaters, with Christ's martyrdom embodying one grandiose redemption of the huge Original Sin debt. It takes time, but by the final chapter this does all slowly bring us to the fraught idea of forgiving debts, of social justice and of one of the most troubling conundrums of the globalized economy. Atwood wastes few words on the issue, directing our attention to the "shadow side" of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, whose money-lending practices have fostered such abominable overspending by irresponsible leaders, leaving their desperate citizens with a bill they have no hope of being able to pay off. In the end Atwood actually says very little about the big issues we expect, mostly because the conclusions to be drawn from her study are so self-evident.

But many readers will still feel let down by Atwood's parting tale, that new, corporate Scrooge taken on a magical mystery tour by the Spirits of Earth Day Past, Present and Future. Seriously, Earth Day. The frustrating part of this little revamp on Dickens isn't that Atwood goes all hippy-dippy on us—her sense of humour remains firmly intact when dryly describing Scrooge's coveting of hemp suits—but that her only prescription for resolving our economic-ecological crisis lies in dreams of sweeping, rather idealistic social change. The cynicism can be read quite easily between the lines, and our hopes of leveling our massive collective debts are left in danger of feeling all the more in vain. I guess it depends on how you read the last lines, as challenge or resignation: "How do I even begin to pay back what I owe? Where should I start?" ▽

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Be going, going gone

Are art auction fundraisers doing more harm than good?

HAMILTON / hamilton@vancouverweekly.com

Now that the bulk of the art auction season has passed, I can safely criticize this annual fundraising tradition that nearly every arts organization in Edmonton participates in. This is not an indictment of artist-run centres and not-for-profits that rely on the art auction as a major annual fundraiser. For many of these groups that operate auctions, they are a great success, helping to support their operations and raise the profile of the organization within the community. However, as the art community grows, are these fundraisers intended to serve the community, usually under the auspices of "helping out the arts." But do they serve the community well? And how could they serve the community better? In indicting the attitude that the art auction is to be treated with the bargain-hunting fervour of a Christmas Day sale. Patrons are not attending or purchasing with an interest of the art or organization in mind. "There's a general perception from the public that going to an art auction automatically there is a bargain to be had," says Vince Gasparri, executive director of Harcourt House. And I think that this may be true. But

ART AUCTIONS

for artists and art organizations they are a major fundraiser and we have to remember that the intention is to raise funds and not simply provide bargain-basement costs."

While many go because it's a great access point into the art community, the notion that you can go for "cheap art" and not engage further in the community doesn't sit well with many. "It sets a strange precedent where people are buying their work through auctions," explains artist Julian Forrest. "You get into a kind of culture."

Galleries are strained to fairly compensate the artist for their donation, while trying to cater to an audience that is expecting a "deal" on art. They start opening bids on auction items very low to encourage bidding. Artists, in turn, see their works go for significantly below market value. However, because this formula is so successful, it has become overused, and within such a small, close-knit art community, the result is that many of the same artists are asked again and again to donate their work to these

(very good) causes. As an artist, if you rely on your work for your income, the tax receipt you get in return does very little to benefit you.

Thus, some artists feel that the auction devalues their work, so when asked for a donation they either refuse or they are inclined to give below-level work because they believe it will go for under market value. Which it frequently (but not always) does.

SO AT THE HEART

of the cyclical nature of this behaviour is fatiguing, and the auction, constrained by this, is showing its age. I think if this cycle continues, we will truly exhaust a very lucrative income source for the visual arts. We must revisit this fundraising strategy in order to ensure that the auction is not only serving the galleries, but the community itself.

Patrons must be encouraged to engage with art in a more meaningful way. "When I'm producing an event that's intended as a fundraiser, I want people to know that they're indeed getting a bargain but they're going to have to anticipate that they're going to have to spend a little more money," says Gasparri. It also means that these organizations have to capture more of their patron's personal infor-

mation, so they can stay informed about programming and events throughout the year.

Galleries and not-for-profits have to diversify the types of auction items going up on the block, and diverse budgets must be accounted for to nurture support from diverse audiences. It also shows a commitment to exposing artists to different audiences and engaging the interested public in a creative and meaningful way.

And, if nothing else, within each organization, there are key members of the community who continue to show their support for the auctions and the organization. These donors serve as leaders, examples of how engaging with the auction and organization positively benefits the community as a whole. These donors can and should be

harnessed as ambassadors and liaisons to the community at large and should be fostered at many levels to encourage diverse audience engagement. ▽

For the record: Harcourt House's Going Once, Going Twice ... raised just under \$22,000; Latitude 53's The Fine Art of Schmoozy raised \$16,000 with the Fine Art of Schmoozy; SNAP's A Christmas Print Affair raised \$650.



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ALBERTA OIL PAINTER'S STUDIO 7711-85 St, 780.465.6172 • Open: Mon-Fri 9am-5pm; Sat 10am-4pm • New artworks by Susan Abma, Susan Box, Pat Eizinga, Margaret Klappstien, Shairi Honey, Tracy Mardon, Cindy Ravell, Michelle Ross

ALLEN GRAY CONTINUING CARE CENTRE 10115-126 St, 780.488.6611 • **BACKYARDS AND OTHER NEIGHBOURHOOD TALES:** Artworks by Gillian Willans and Allen Gray residents

ART BEAT GALLERY 7801-4th Ave, St. Albert, 780.459.3679, www.artbeat.ab.ca • Featuring artworks by Tinyan

ART GALLERY OF ALBERTA Enterprise Square, 100, 10230 Jasper Ave, 780.422.6223 • Open Mon-Fri 10:30am-5pm; Thu 10:30am-8pm (4-8pm free); Sat-Sun 11am-5pm • **ARENA: The Art of Hockey;** until Jan 4 • **30 YEARS YOUNG: The Edmonton Oilers 30th Anniversary Showcase:** Featuring items from moments in the team's history; until Jan 4 • **IMAGINING SCIENCE:** Until Feb 1 • Art for Lunch: Seeing Science: Exploring the Intersections of Art and Science with Catherine Crowston; Dec 18, 12:10-12:50pm; meet in gallery foyer • Free (members); \$10 (adult)/\$7 (senior/student); \$5 (6-12yrs)/free (5yrs and under)/\$20 (family-2 adults, 4 children)

CENTRE D'ARTS VISUELS DE L'ALBERTA 9103-95 Ave, 780.461.3427 • **MINIATURES A/V:** E. Miniatures exhibit by George and Janet Kubac • Until Dec 20

DOUGLAS UDELL GALLERY 10322-174 St, 780.488.4445 • Group show • Until Dec 20

FAB GALLERY Room 1-1 Fine Arts Building, U of A, 112 St, 89 Ave, 780.492.2081 • **WAVE 2008** until Dec 23, Jan 6-17 • Opening reception: Dec 18, 7-10pm

FRINGE GALLERY 10516 Whyte Ave, basement of the Paint Spot, 780.432.0240 • **ABYSS BLISS:** Paintings by Cynthia Fuhrer, until Dec 30 • **THUS I REFUTE:** Artworks by Travis McEwen and Mandy Espezel; through Jan; opening reception: Jan 10, 2-4pm

GALLERY IS 4930-Ross St, Red Deer, 403.341.4641 • **3rd Annual Miniatures Exhibit:** Group show • Until Dec 31

GALLERY AT MILNER Stanley A. Milner Library Main Fl, Sir Winston Churchill Square, 780.496.7030 • **DANCING THE MAN RHYTHM:** Paintings by Laurie McFayden and Catherine Lester; until Dec

22 • **PAINTED SPIRIT:** Paintings by Adam Halicki; Jan 2-30

BARCOURT HOUSE 11115-112 St, 780.426.4180 • Open Mon-Fri 10am-5pm; Sat 12-4pm • **Main Space:** PASSAGE: Installation by Elizabeth Beauchamp and Lynn Malin; until Dec 20 • **Front Room Gallery:** SOFTLY, SOFTLY: IMAGES OF FEMININITY: Artworks by Andrea Magnuson; until Dec 20

JEFF ALLEN GALLERY Strathcona Place Senior Centre, 10831 University Ave, 780.426.4180 • **CHRISTMAS SPOT AND SALE:** Artworks by the artists who exhibited in 2008; until Dec 22 • **HAROLD SKINNER AND GROUP:** Mixed media tree paintings by the St Albert Painters Guild; Jan 6-29; opening reception: Jan 14, 6:30-8:30pm

JOHNSON GALLERY • 7711-85 St, 780.465.6171; Annual Christmas art fair, artworks by a variety of artists • Northside: 11817-80 St, 780.479.8424; Christmas art fair, artworks by various artists, new works by Noboru Kubo

KAMENA 5718 Calgary Tr S, 780.944.9497 • Mon-Wed, Fri 10am-6pm; Thu 10am-7pm, Sat 10am-5pm • Featuring artworks by various artists

LOFT GALLERY A. J. Chynoweth Arts Centre, 590 Broadmoor Blvd, Sherwood Park, 780.998-3091 • **MY FAVOURITE THINGS:** AND MORE! **MINIATURES:** The Art Society of Strathcona County • Until Jan 3

MICHIF CULTURAL AND MÉTIS RESOURCE INSTITUTE 9111-126 St, St. Albert, 780.651.8176 • Open: Mon-Fri 9am-4pm; weekends by appt • Aboriginal Veterans Display • Gift Shop • Finger weaving and sash display by Celina Loyer

McMULLEN GALLERY 11115-112 St, 780.407.7152 • Open Mon-Fri 10am-8pm; Sat-Sun 1-8pm • **CROSSING THE BOUNDARIES:** The International Visual and Performing Arts Society of Canada display of artworks • Until Dec 31

MCPAG (Multicultural Centre Public Art Gallery) 5411-51 St, Stony Plain, 780.963.2777 • Open Mon-Sat 10-4pm; Sun 10-6:30pm • Dan Bagan Drawings and paintings • Until Jan 20

McMULLEN GALLERY 11115-112 St, 780.407.7152 • Open: Mon-Fri 10am-8pm; Sat-Sun noon-6pm; evenings/weekends subject to volunteer availability • International Visual Arts Artworks by members of the International Visual and Performing Arts Society of Canada • Until Dec 31

MUSÉE HÉRITAGE MUSEUM 5 St. Anne Street, St. Albert, 780.459.1528 • Open Tue-Sat 10am-5pm; Sun 1-5pm • **THE BISHOP WHO ATE HIS BOOTS:** Celebration of the life and legacy of Isaac and Sadie Stringer and their mission to the Arctic • Until Mar 15 • Opening reception: Jan 8, 7pm

NINA HAGGERTY Stollery Gallery 9704-

111 Ave, 780.474.7611 • Open Mon, Wed, Fri 9:30am-2:30pm; Tue, Thu 9:30-4pm, 6:30-8:30pm • **NO TWO ALIKE:** Until Dec 24 • Artworks by Meital Siva and Liron Steinpress; Jan 5-Feb 1

PETER ROBERTSON GALLERY 11115-112 St, 780.452.0286 • Open Tue-Sat 11am-5pm • Photographs by Brianna Hughes

PICTURE THIS GALLERY 959 Ordze Rd, Sherwood Park, 780.467.3038, PictureThisGallery.com • Artworks by Brent Heighton, Dean McLeod, Jonn Einerssen, Murray Phillips, Charles H. White, and others • Until Dec 20

PORTAL ART GALLERY 11115-112 St, 780.702.7522 • Artworks by Giselle Denis, Cheri Denis, and Rocco Macri • Until Jan 10

PROFILES PUBLIC ART GALLERY 11115-112 St, St. Albert, 780.460.4310 • Open Tue-Sat (10am-5pm), Thu (10am-8pm) • **ENCHANTED:** Mindy Andrews, Ilse Anyas-Salkauskas, Susan Greenbank, Liv Pedersen, Pat Strakowski and Pam Weber • Until Dec 23 • ArtVentures: Beautiful Buildings: for children 6-12 yrs; Dec 20, 1-4pm; \$5 per child

ROYAL ALBERTA MUSEUM 10115-112 St, 780.453.9100 • Open daily 9-5pm • **ARTE EN LA CHARRERIA:** Craftsmanship and design distinctive to the Mexican cowboy; Until Apr 13 • **JOSHUA'S JOURNEY:** Joshua Loper's first trail ride on the Chisholm Trail; Until Jan 4 • **ALBERTA COWBOYS IN ART:** Until Jan 4 • **HEIGHTS OF FASHION:** History of the Elevated Foot; until Mar 8 • **Government House:** Tours on Sat, Sun, holidays, 11am-4:30pm, phone 780.427.2281

SCOTT GALLERY 10411-124 St, 780.488.3619 • Open: Tue-Sat (10-5pm) • **CELEBRATING THE SEASON:** Artworks by Brenda Malkinson, Robert Sinclair, Martha Cole, David Mitchell, and Maureen Harvey • Until Dec 24

SHAWTHORN THERAPY 10411-124 St, 780.488.3619 • **NEW SEASONS:** Artworks by Igor Woroniuk • Until Dec 20

SNAP GALLERY 10309-97 St, 780.423.1492 • **A CHRISTMAS PRINT AFFAIR:** Until Dec 20

SPRUCE GROVE ART GALLERY 420 King St, Spruce Grove, 780.962.0664 • Artworks by Rhonda Thurn

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LITERARY

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UPPER CRUST CAFÉ 10909-86 Ave, 780.422.8174 • **THE POETS' HAVEN:** Monday Night reading series presented by Stroll of Poets • Every Mon, 7pm • \$5 door

THEATRE

BLACK HEARTS IN THE GREEN ROOM Walterdale Playhouse, 10322-83 Ave • By Scott Sharplin • The Walterdale Melodrama is back. Walterdale's legendary ghosts take centre stage in this thrilling and uproarious tale of a hapless community theatre beset by spectres • Until Dec 20, 8pm • \$12-\$16 at TIX on the Square

CHIMPROV Varscona Theatre, 10329-83 Ave, 780.433.3399 • Rapid Fire Theatre presents comedy for the sophisticated; Runs every Sat (11pm) except for the last Sat of each month until mid June 2009. Next Chimprov will be in January

A CHRISTMAS CAROL Citadel Theatre, 9828-101A Ave • A retelling of Dickens' classic, adapted by Tom Wood. Part of the Robbins Family Series • Until Dec 23 (7:30pm, 1:30pm matinees) • Tickets at the Citadel box office 780.425.1820

CHRISTMAS CAROL PROJECT Winspear Centre, 9720-102 Ave • A Brass Monkey Production • The 13th annual Christmas Carol Project • Sat, Dec 27, 8-11pm • \$27 (advance)/\$32 (door) • Tickets available at Winspear Centre

THE COMING OF THE KINGS Avenue Theatre, 9030-118 Ave, 780.477.2773 ext 107 • Theatre Prospero • Dec 19-21, 7:30pm; School matinee: Tue-Fri until Dec 19; Dec 20-21, 2pm and 7:30pm • Tickets \$16 (adult)/\$12 (students/senior)/\$8 (child 12 and under) at TIX on the Square, door

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DR SUSANNA CHRISTMAS SPECIAL Varscona Theatre, 10329-83 Ave, 780.433.3399 • A salute to the season and the solstice, hosted by enchanting elf, Susanna Patchouli, and the ever-jolly Eros God of Love! Laughs! Music! EGGNOG! • Sat Dec 20, 11pm • Tickets at the door

PEACE, LOVE AND ROCK 'N' ROLL? AND THE BEAT GOES ON Mayfield Dinner Theatre, 16615-109 Ave, 780.483.4051 • Written and compiled by Will Marks, a sequel to last year's hit • Until Feb 15 • Tickets at Mayfield box office, toll-free: 1.877.529.7829

PIRATES OF THE NORTH SASKATCHEWAN 2: HANSMAN'S CURSE Jubilations Dinner Theatre, 8882 170 St, Phase III, WEM, 780.484.2424 • Until Feb 1; Wed-Sat, 6:30pm; Sun 5pm

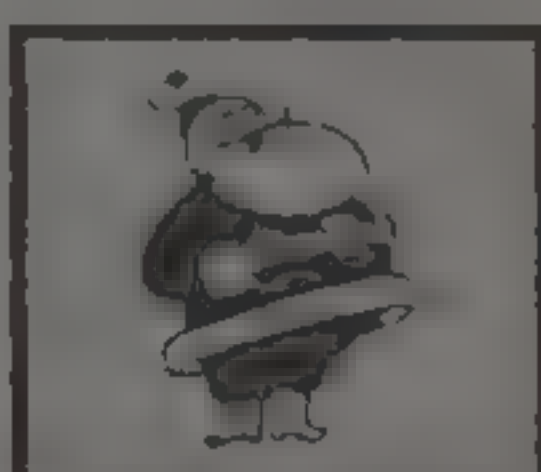
THE PLAY ABOUT THE BABY Roxy, 10708-124 St, 780.453.2440, www.attheroxy.com • Image Theatre/Theatre Network • By Edward Albee. Directed by Ryan Hughes. Starring Coralie Cairns, Douglas Tokaryk, Ava Markus, Jon Lachlan Stewart • Jan 6-18, Tue-Sat 8pm; Sun 2pm • \$20 (adult)/\$15 (student/senior); Tue: Two-for \$20; Previews (Jan 6 and 7): \$15; Opening night: \$25 • Tickets available at TIX on the Square

THEATERSPORTS Winspear Centre, 9720-102 Ave, 780.448.0695, www.rapid-firetheatre.com • Rapid Fire Theatre's weekly insane improv show • Every Fri (11pm) • Until July 2009

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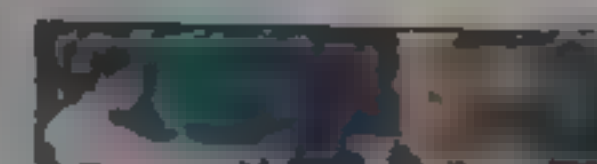
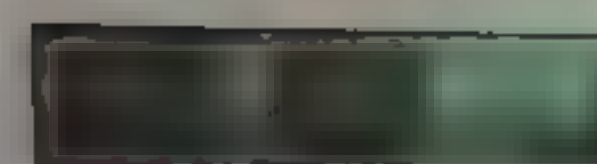


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It's about everything

Synecdoche, New York continues Kaufman's playful project

JOSEF BRAUN / josef@vuwweekly.com

His body is doing strange things, any of which may cradle some indefinable kernel of death waiting to metastasize. He is attacked by his own sink. His wife is becoming stant, dissatisfied and resentful. He pines toward some startling innovation for the stage, yet he's directing *Death of a Salesman* at an amateur theatre for small town blue-hairs, the incongruently young actors and deluge of lighting cues being his meager concessions to formalist provocation. His lead actress and the sultry box office attendant both make advances, yet he's too paralyzed and conflicted to respond. His daughter's poo is green. His mystery ailments mount and relationships collapse, Caden Cotard (Philip Seymour Hoffman) develops an acute case of Sisyphus syndrome. Everything seems to bear down on him. So when out of the blue he becomes the unlikely recipient of a MacArthur "genius" grant, he does the only logical thing: he makes a play about everything. Or everything as can be conveyed through the very peculiar, very funny and very sad experiences of Caden Cotard. He lives in Schenectady,

PREVIEW

OPENS FRI, DEC 19
SYNECDOCHE, NEW YORK
WRITTEN & DIRECTED BY CHARLIE KAUFMAN
STARRING PHILIP SEYMOUR HOFFMAN, SAMANTHA MORTON, MICHELLE WILLIAMS
★★★★★

New York, but he's about to move somewhere you won't find on a map

Synecdoche, New York is not as ambitious as Caden's play. We can say this for the simple reason that the movie was finished—or, if you'd rather, abandoned—whereas the play stays in rehearsal for decades. But screenwriter Charlie Kaufman's directorial debut is nonetheless mightily impressive, and, at the risk of sounding hyperbolic, it's genuinely like nothing you've seen. It teems with metaphor, is sprawling in scope, dense with so many kinds of heartache and is playfully, boundlessly alive with the absurd. It should be far too much for any one movie to hold, but here it is nonetheless, running two hours, and fronted, all too appropriately, by one of the most imminently melancholic and corpulent actors working in interesting movies. Hoffman does Kaufman, thankfully. I'm not sure anyone else could



AFTER PHILIP K DICK, who never made a movie but probably spawned more of them than any late-20th century American writer, Charlie Kaufman must surely be the most influential author of neurological disorder-driven storytelling in current pop culture. What other body of work, from *Being John Malkovich* to *Adaptation* to *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, has so directly, imaginatively and often perversely addressed the puzzle nature of identity? Selfhood is ever fluid, restless and delightfully insubordinate in Kaufman's stories, diasporic in its tendencies, spreading out amidst the individual bearer's surroundings until what you consider uniquely "you" is either infiltrated by another—or many others, if you happen to be John Malkovich—or appropriated by another, i.e. the two Kaufmans of *Adaptation*. Bizarre as it

may be, *Synecdoche, New York* is, in hindsight at least, the inevitable product of the Kaufman project thus far

While the impossibility of lasting connection between people looms over the film, everything in it thematically connects to everything else Caden's wife (Catherine Keener), in a direct reversal of Caden's attempt to

create something massive, makes highly nuanced paintings the size of postage stamps, while his daughter grows up to be literally art-damaged, the confused victim of her parents' reckless expression. Those closest to Caden exist in some permanent state of metaphor-manifest, most notably Hazel (Samantha Morton, wonderful), who, in one of the film's most inspired conceits, lives in a house that's perpetually on fire. Caden's therapist (Hope Davis) writes books that literally speak directly to him. And all of this demands to be woven into Caden's play. Countless actors are employed. Eventually new actors are hired to play the original actors, because the original actors become part of the story, even threatening to take it over. Vast sets are constructed to contain it all. The whole thing is finally infinite, Borgesian. It's an attempt to generate authenticity through artifice, to address life through art until art is all that's left. And perhaps this is why the ending's so damned blue. The thrill of art is always in the making; the result finally just a eulogy for a process. ♥

VUEWEEKLY
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Writer Block
/ BY DAVID BERRY

"With the release of *Synecdoche, New York*, Charlie Kaufman has officially given up one of the most elusive designations in the world: the recognizable screenwriter."

Still shifts with time

FLICKS DVDetective

JOSEF BRAUN
dvdetective@vuwweekly.com

The premise, however mimicked over the years, still intrigues. The spacecraft descends upon Washington DC, the stoic alien emerges from within, the gasping crowds look on, the rifles, canons and tanks are at the ready. Before he can get a word out, before he can offer his enigmatic little metallic flower/toilet cleaner thingee, the alien's preemptively shot in the chest by jittery US military. He's taken to hospital, is examined, and recovers completely. In appearance and mode of expression he seems one of us, more or less—he's played by English actor Michael Rennie—but is very emphatically Other. He speaks of "your months," "your rules" and "your Walter Reed Hospital." He speaks to his robot in a language that sounds like Japanese. He's a

chameleon. His name is Klaatu. He's come a long way to give us some sobering advice. He seems unshakably civil, but if his words aren't heeded, he promises to exact an apocalyptic wrath beyond comprehension.

Though made during those first tender years of the Cold War and wielding an overt message in response to the proliferation of nuclear arms, *The Day the Earth Stood Still* pulsates with age-old anxieties. It's a religious impulse, perhaps, this desire to be visited by some colossal vision, illuminated by some transcendent Word, chastised and threatened with awesome punishment. There's a desperate longing for oblivion blended deftly into this entertainment. We are rendered small by it. But the eagerness to repent and defer to a higher authority deserves some serious consideration.

Directed by Robert Wise, written by Edmund North, beautifully photographed by Leo Tover, mesmerizingly scored with

double theremin in the mix by Bernard Herrmann, the film is far too superbly crafted to be dismissed as period kitsch, even if the appearance of Gort, Klaatu's mostly immobile giant robot, its featureless visage the subject of many creepily inert close-ups, locates it firmly within the imaginative limits of contemporaneous science fiction. Following Klaatu's unmet demands to confer with ambassadors from every country in the world, the story slides from the grandiose to the intimate and back again, with some of the most memorable scenes occurring during Klaatu's escape from captivity and quiet immersion in everyday American life, his spooky arrival at the rooming house bathed in shadow, or his final taxi ride with Helen (Patricia Neal), a single mom who along with her happy little boy represents our hopes for betterment. The fact that Klaatu mixes in so easily is of course the point—the Other we fear so is really not so Otherly after all. It's a fable in service of tolerance and multiculturalism.

YET IF WE ALLOW ourselves to play devil's advocate, to set to one side the supposed moral clarity of Klaatu's call for the cessation of violence, if we look care-

fully at this offer we can't refuse, there's a most contradictory nature to it that feels ironically akin to recent US foreign policy and the clash of civilizations. I come from a distant place where we know better, Klaatu declares, and your earthly ways don't jive with ours. Frankly, we can't tolerate it anymore. Change, Klaatu instructs. Be like we are, and make peace. Or we'll kill you all. Hegemony rules, and whether international or interplanetary, whether the subjects of the new empire are in the Middle East or the Midwest, the ostensible simplicity and benevolence of this proposal is compromised by the condescension and threat behind it.

So Klaatu is the enlightened alien Other, yet is also quintessentially American, or, if you prefer, human, doing what humans are wont to do when granted immense power. While this reading may very well counter the intentions of Wise, North, et al, addressing this aspect of *The Day the Earth Stood Still* isn't meant to belittle it but rather reveal just how complex and durable it has proven to be. It's a virtue of the best science fiction that its value to audiences will shift with time and revelation.

Fox's new two-disc special edition of

The Day the Earth Stood Still, presumably prompted by the theatrical release of the remake, may not offer alternative readings, but it is loaded with supplements to help appreciate the film's gestation and legacy. A making-of featurette has amusing testimony from Neal—who apparently couldn't stop laughing during the filming—insights into the film's technical innovations, and some terrific weird facts, such as Gort's later life as a performance accessory for Bozo the Clown. There's also a fun little doc on flying saucers that covers the basic territory—Kenneth Arnold, Betty and Barney Hill, Roswell, et cetera—and equally welcome profiles of North and of Harry Bates, the forgotten magazine editor and author of the course material. These docs are annoyingly cutty, with too many commentators and not enough content from each of them to justify their appearances, but they still give you a flavour of the conditions of the film's development. There's also a new audio commentary from Nick Redman, John Morgan, Steven Smith and William Stromberg that, like their commentary for Fox's recent release of *Garden of Evil*, focuses exclusively on Herrmann's music. ♥

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RACHEL GETTING MARRIED
FRI. TUESDAY - 7:00PM - SAT. 1:00PM
RATED: PG - MATURE THEMES, DRUG USE, LANGUAGE

THE BOY IN THE STRIPED PAJAMAS
FRI. TUESDAY - 7:00PM
SAT. & SUNDAY MATINEES - 1:00PM
RATED: PG - MATURE THEMES, DISTURBING CONTENT

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TRUCK REVIEWS

FILM CAPSULES



THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL

OPENING THIS WEEK

TUYA'S MARRIAGE

DIRECTED BY QUAN AN WANG
WRITTEN BY WANG, WELU

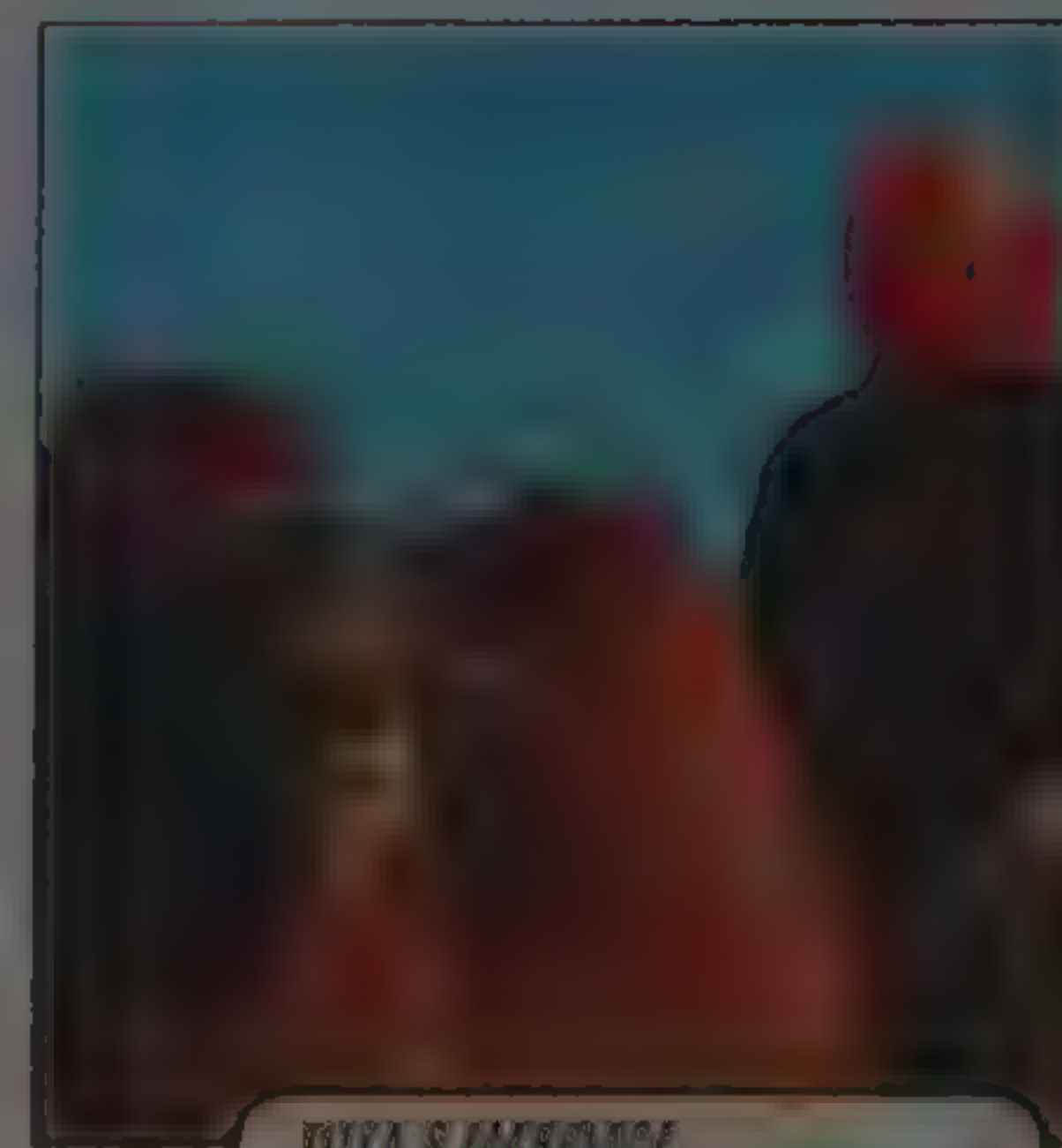
STARRING NAN YU, BATER, SENGE
FRI, DEC 19 - MON, DEC 22 (7 & 9 PM); METRO CINEMA
★★★★

OMAR MOUALLLEM / omar@vuwweekly.com

Mongolia is not a hotbed for movies, obviously, but getting a cinematic glimpse into this once-successful empire, now a humbled region of China, is a delight. *Tuya's Marriage* is set on a destitute sheep farm at high-altitude. It makes great use of the barren region, turning the tundra into a photogenic landscape.

The story is of one amazing woman trying to ensure her family's survival. Actress Nan Yu, who usually presents a lean physique and a graceful smile, plays Tuya—a broad, brawny, back-breaking farmer and mother. She's best exemplified when, after a frantic search through a blizzard, Tuya finds her terrified, young son Zhaya. She promises him that if a pack of wolves were to come near him, "Mama would eat them." Imagine that for a second. How insanely comforting, and wild, is that?

Her husband Bater is crippled and,



TUYA'S MARRIAGE

regretfully, unable to provide. (The non-actor, known only as Bater, was or is a herdsman from the same region.) She gets a little help from her drunk neighbour Senge, but mostly she is dragging his drunk ass home from the random places he passes out in. (This one-named non-actor, Senge, is an equestrian discovered by the director at a horse race.) Tuya also has two small children and hundreds of sheep to attend to.

She stubbornly does everything herself until, after an injury, a doctor advises her to stop before she's crippled, too. To her chagrin, Bater convinces her to divorce him and find someone who could fill his role as patriarch. But Tuya has unrealistic expectations of the bachelors who show up in droves; if they want her hand in marriage, they have to take Bater's, too.

Despite all its cultural unfamiliarity, it's easy to understand Tuya's desperation and laud her pursuit of happiness for everyone but herself. No matter how slim the relatability, nobody can't appreciate a character of her ilk, and Nan Yu grasps the complexity perfectly. If you were to gift Tuya a novelty mug, it would be the World's Best Mother, Wife, Friend and Provider mug. And for Ms Yu, perhaps a Best Actress mug, or Oscar.

Every performance in *Tuya's Marriage* is stellar, especially considering all but Nan Yu are non-actors discovered by Quan An Wang, a Chinese director who proves great patience in taking a chance on them. If it wasn't out of necessity, it's good directorial decision. As great as Nan Yu is, finding more than one person able to accurately portray these people—minorities of a minority—would be difficult.

Best of all, *Tuya's Marriage* is not just a Hallmark Card from the hinterlands. It's a hilarious romp, too. The suitors she's offered and the egghead actions of Senge

are purposely funny and play well into Tuya's frustrations. Quan An proves a talent for balancing the two, and never limiting the scene to just one or the other. The humour and drama, as well as the meditative flow, makes this a strong foreign contender at this year's Academy Awards.

NOW PLAYING

THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL

DIRECTED BY SCOTT DERICKSON

WRITTEN BY DAVID SCARFA

STARRING JENNIFER CONNELLY, KEANU REEVES

★

JOSEF BRAUN / josef@vuwweekly.com

A famous American once said there's nothing to fear but fear itself, but fear itself can be pretty goddamned scary. Apparently when Americans feel fear they instinctively resort to blowing shit up, no matter how unbelievably stupid such actions may be. In the new, longer, dumber and duller version of *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, poor old Klaatu, the alien gets pumped with lead before he can even get a word out. His people have studied long to understand our earthly ways but I guess no one ever told them it was dangerous to be in Central Park at night.

Klaatu arrives in a big misty sphere to serve mankind its eviction notice. We've abused this planet long enough, it seems, and interplanetary real estate's at a premium, so out we go in a plague of metallic locusts that can chomp through baseball stadiums without stopping for a breather. Unless of course, like Ebenezer Scrooge, we can convince our executioner of our capacity for change.

After Klaatu busts out of his placenta suit and absconds, rather implausibly from the military facility where he's being prodded, he spends a little time in our company. Disguised as Keanu Reeves in a suit—is this really the most inconspicuous shape he could think to assume?—he liaisons with astrophysicist Helen Benson (Jennifer Connelly). She gives him a lift to some state park where more alien spheres lay waiting to get their Armageddon on. From there it's off to the home of a Nobel-prize winning biologist (John Cleese) where Klaatu hears Bach. It's beautiful, he says with genuine awe. Somebody take this guy to a record store. We could speed things along with some Procol Harum.

If the aliens really do come and threaten to kill us all, it would certainly not be

metro CINEMA **DECEMBER 19-22**

TUYA'S MARRIAGE

DIRECTED BY QUAN AN WANG

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to show them this movie. In resuscitate the dead, make them smash into each other, create loud noises and get tuna sandwich out of the vending machines for \$1.00. Not going to be impressed by some special effects, the pointless camera swoops around cars and the matched green-screening. He has a soft spot for kids, granted, but his stepson is so relentlessly young that such a gambit seems bound to backfire. Helen herself is a bit flat, but Klatu's libido has apparently been Zenned into submission. So yeah, *Delgo* is just as didactic as the *Star Wars* while lacking all of its fun. Yet Scott Derrickson seems uninterested in fun anyway. His apocalypse is not the overwhelming loss flatly stated in the menace bland, the story is just padded. The original film's spooky spookiness has been traded in for a lot of imagery and boilerplate design. It doesn't help much, either. The single thing he needs to do here is change his mind, yet he can't quite manage it.

DELGO

BY MARC F ADLER, JASON MAURER
WRITTEN BY PATRICK J COWAN, CARL DREAM,
JENNIFER A JONES
STARRING FREDDIE PRINZE JR, JENNIFER LOVE HEWITT

With their natural resources evaporating, the winged Nohrins immigrated to Jhamonia, the country long settled by the Lockni, and were initially welcomed warmly. But the Nohrins got greedy and took more than their share and things got ugly, ending only when the Nohrin evil schemer Sedessa was banished to some awful place inhabited by gargoyles-like creatures with digestion problems. All this is relayed in the wittily paced prelude to *Delgo* and, though parallels to real life histories of colonialism—including recent misadventures in the Middle East—are admirably conveyed, the deluge of exposition may prove a bit much for the little ones to absorb. Me, I had more trouble keeping the goofy names straight.

The exploration of the perils of empire, the inclusion of a character with a gambling addiction, and the forbidden interracial romance that drives the narrative give *Delgo* some nice, timely shading, but I'm not certain if that all these efforts finally play out to any great effect. The first third intrigues well enough, but once the action starts the character development essentially stops, and there's an awful lot of over-long fights and chases that lack excitement. It doesn't help that several characters are dreadfully flat, while the potentially more dynamic characters are either shelved early on or suffer deeply uninspired vocal performances from Freddie Prinze Jr, Jennifer Love Hewitt or Chris Kattan, who voices the hero's grating pop sidekick.

The best thing in *Delgo* is in fact the last thing in *Delgo*, at least in moral terms, which is to say the villain steals a half and a half years ago, but her sultry voice makes one final and highly pleasurable contribution here as Sedessa, by far the most eroticized creature on display in this otherwise largely neutered fantasy realm. In one scene she slinks about in a

CONTINUES ON NEXT PAGE

FILM WEEKLY

FRI, DEC 19 - THU, DEC 24, 2008

All showtimes are subject to change at any time. Please contact theatre to confirm.

CHAMA THEATRE JACKSON

6094 Connaught Dr. Jasper, 720.852.4749

FOUR CHRISTMASSES (PG, crude content, language may offend) Fri-Sat 7:00, 9:00; Sun-Tue 8:00

YES MAN (14A) Fri-Sat 7:00, 9:00; Sun-Tue 8:00

CINEMA CITY MOVIES 12

130 Ave 50 St. 720.472.3772

CHANGELING (14A, violence, language) Fri-Sat 1:15, 4:10, 6:50, 9:30; Sun-Tue 1:15, 4:10, 6:50, 9:30, 12:10

PASSCHENDAELE (14A, violence, language) Fri-Sat 1:15, 4:10, 6:50, 9:30, 12:10; Sun-Tue 1:15, 4:10, 6:50, 9:30, 12:10

MAX PAYNE (14A, violence, language) Fri-Sat 1:15, 4:10, 6:50, 9:30, 12:10; Sun-Tue 1:15, 4:10, 6:50, 9:30, 12:10

BODY OF LIES (14A, violence, language) Fri-Sat 1:15, 4:10, 6:50, 9:30, 12:10; Sun-Tue 1:15, 4:10, 6:50, 9:30, 12:10

BEVERLY HILLS CHIHUAHUA (G) Fri-Sat 1:20, 2:00, 4:00, 4:45, 6:40, 7:25, 9:10, 9:50, 11:30; Sun-Tue 1:20, 2:00, 4:00, 4:45, 6:40, 7:25, 9:10, 9:50, 11:30

EAGLE EYE (14A) Fri-Sat 1:25, 4:25, 7:00, 9:45, 12:10; Sun-Tue 1:25, 4:25, 7:00, 9:45, 12:10

IGOR (PG) Fri-Wed 1:50, 4:35

LAKEVIEW TERRACE (14A, coarse language) Fri-Sat 7:20, 10:00, 12:20; Sun-Tue 7:20, 10:00, 12:20

APPALOOSA (14A) Fri-Sat 6:45, 9:20, 11:50; Sun-Tue 6:45, 9:20, 11:50

BURN AFTER READING (14A, violence, coarse language) Fri-Sat 1:45, 4:40, 7:15, 9:25, 11:40; Sun-Tue 1:45, 4:40, 7:15, 9:25, 11:40

THE DARK KNIGHT (PG, violence, frightening scenes, not recommended for young children) Fri-Sat 1:10, 4:20, 7:40, 11:20; Sun-Wed 1:10, 4:20, 7:40; Thu 4:20, 7:40

MAMMA MIA (PG) Fri-Sat 1:40, 4:15, 7:05, 9:35, 11:55; Sun-Tue 1:40, 4:15, 7:05, 9:35, 11:55

WALL-E (G) Fri-Wed 1:30, 4:30

GHAJINI (HINDI W.E.S.T.) (STC) Thu 4:35, 8:15

HIGH SCHOOL MUSICAL 3: SENIOR YEAR (G) Thu 4:05, 4:50, 6:45, 7:25, 9:15, 9:55

CINEPLEX ODEON NORTH

1000 10th Avenue, 720.720.2222

THE TALE OF DESPEREAUX (G) No passes Fri-Tue 12:10, 2:20, 4:35, 7:00, 9:10; Wed 12:10, 2:20, 4:35, 7:00; Thu 4:35, 7:00, 9:10

SEVEN POUNDS (14A, mature themes) No passes Fri-Tue 1:10, 4:10, 7:10, 10:10; Wed 1:20, 4:10, 7:10, 10:10; Thu 4:10, 7:05, 10:00

YES MAN (14A) No passes Fri-Tue 12:20, 2:45, 5:15, 7:40, 10:10, 12:20, 2:45, 5:15, 7:40; Thu 5:15, 7:40, 10:10

THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL (PG) No passes Fri-Tue 1:30, 2:40, 4:00, 5:10, 6:40, 7:30, 9:20, 10:20; Wed 1:30, 2:40, 4:00, 5:10, 6:40, 7:30, 9:20, 10:20; Thu 3:40, 4:40, 9:20

FOUR CHRISTMASSES (PG, crude content, language may offend) Fri-Tue 12:40, 3:00, 5:20, 7:15, 9:10; Wed 12:40, 3:00, 5:20, 7:15, 9:10; Thu 5:20, 7:45, 10:10

AUSTRALIA (PG, violence, language may offend) Fri-Tue 12:50, 4:20, 8:30; Wed 2:10, 6:20

TRANSPORTER 3 (14A) Fri-Tue 5:30, 8:00, 10:30; Wed 2:00, 5:30, 8:00

BOLT (G) Fri-Wed 1:10, 3:40; Thu 4:45, 7:15, 9:40; Digital 3d Fri-Tue 12:00, 2:30, 4:45, 7:15, 9:45; Digital 3d Wed 12:00, 2:30, 4:45, 7:15, 9:45

TWILIGHT (PG, violence, language may offend) Fri-Tue 1:00, 3:50, 6:50, 9:40; Wed 1:00, 3:50, 6:50, 9:40

QUANTUM OF SOLACE (14A) Fri-Tue 1:40, 4:30, 6:30, 7:30, 9:00, 10:15; Wed 1:40, 4:30, 6:30, 7:30, 9:00, 10:15; Thu 4:30, 7:30, 9:00

MADAGASCAR: ESCAPE 2 AFRICA (G) Fri-Tue 12:30, 2:50, 5:05, 7:20, 9:30; Wed 12:30, 2:50, 5:05, 7:20, 9:30

ROLE MODELS (14A, crude content, coarse language) Fri, Sun-Tue 1:50, 4:15, 6:45, 9:15; Sat 4:15, 6:45, 9:15

THE TALE OF DESPEREAUX (G) No passes Fri-Tue 12:10, 2:20, 4:35, 7:00, 9:10; Wed 12:10, 2:20, 4:35, 7:00, 9:10; Thu 4:35, 7:00, 9:10

Wed 1:50, 4:50, 7:25

METROPOLITAN OPERA: THAIS

(Classification not available) Sat 10:00

BEDTIME STORIES (G) No passes Thu 5:30, 7:50, 10:30

MARLEY AND ME (PG) No passes Thu 4:00, 7:20, 10:05

THE CURIOUS CASE OF BENJAMIN BUTTON (PG, not recommended for young children, coarse language) No passes Thu 4:20, 8:30

THE SPIRIT (STC) Thu 5:00, 8:00, 10:40

VALKYRIE (PG, violence, coarse language) Thu 4:40, 7:30, 10:15

DOUBT (STC) Thu 4:40, 7:30, 10:15

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THE TALE OF DESPEREAUX (G) No passes Fri-Tue 12:00, 2:10, 4:45, 7:10, 9:30; Wed 12:00, 2:20, 4:45, 7:10

SEVEN POUNDS (14A, mature themes) No passes Fri-Tue 1:20, 4:10, 7:00, 10:10; Wed 1:20, 4:10, 7:00

YES MAN (14A) No passes Fri-Tue 12:50, 3:20, 7:15, 10:30; Wed 12:50, 3:20, 7:15, 10:30, 12:20

THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL (PG) No passes Fri-Tue 12:00, 12:30, 3:10, 3:30, 6:40, 7:30, 9:10, 10:20; Wed 12:00, 12:30, 3:10, 3:30, 6:40, 7:30; Thu 12:30, 3:30, 7:30, 10:30

RAB NE BANA DI JODI (HINDI W.E.S.T.) (PG) Fri-Tue, Thu 12:15, 4:00, 8:00; Wed 12:15, 4:00

PUNISHER: WAR ZONE (18A, gory scenes, brutal violence) Fri-Tue 7:10, 9:30; Wed 7:10

FOUR CHRISTMASSES (PG, crude content, language may offend) Fri-Tue 12:10, 2:40, 5:00, 7:20, 9:50; Wed 12:10, 2:40, 5:00, 7:20; Thu 12:10, 2:40, 5:00, 7:15, 9:50

MILK (14A, coarse language) Fri-Tue 12:40, 3:45, 6:50, 9:50; Wed 12:40, 3:45, 6:50; Thu 12:40, 3:45, 6:40, 9:50

AUSTRALIA (PG, violence, language may offend) Fri-Tue 2:00, 6:30, 10:00; Wed 2:00, 6:30

TRANSPORTER 3 (14A) Fri-Tue 1:10, 4:20, 7:15, 10:10; Wed 1:10, 4:20, 7:15

BOLT (G) Fri-Wed 1:30, 4:00; Digital 3d Fri-Tue, Thu 12:10, 2:30, 4:50, 7:20, 9:40; Wed 12:10, 2:30, 4:50, 7:20

TWILIGHT (PG, violence) Fri-Tue 1:15, 4:40, 7:30, 10:30; Wed 1:15, 4:40, 7:30; Thu 1:15, 4:40, 7:20, 10:20

QUANTUM OF SOLACE (14A) Fri-Tue 1:00, 3:50, 7:00, 9:40; Wed 1:00, 3:50, 7:00; Thu 1:00, 3:50, 6:45, 9:40

MADAGASCAR: ESCAPE 2 AFRICA (G) Fri-Tue 11:50, 2:20, 4:30, 6:45, 9:00; Wed 11:50, 2:20, 4:30, 6:45

ROLE MODELS (14A, crude content, coarse language) Fri, Sun-Tue 1:45, 4:15, 6:45, 9:15; Sat 4:15, 6:45, 9:15

METROPOLITAN OPERA: THAIS (Classification not available) Sat 10:00

BEDTIME STORIES (G) No passes Thu 12:00, 2:30, 5:00, 7:30, 10:00

MARLEY AND ME (PG) No passes Thu 1:15, 4:15, 7:40, 10:30

THE CURIOUS CASE OF BENJAMIN BUTTON (PG, not recommended for young children, coarse language) No passes Thu 12:15, 4:00, 8:00

THE SPIRIT (STC) Thu 1:30, 4:00, 7:30, 10:30

VALKYRIE (PG, violence, coarse language) Thu 12:20, 3:10, 6:50, 9:45

DOUBT (STC) Thu 1:40, 4:15, 6:50, 9:45

CITY CENTRE 9

1000 10th Ave, 720.421.7070

YES MAN (14A) No passes, Dolby Stereo Digital Fri-Tue 1:10, 3:40, 6:45, 9:45; Sat 1:10, 3:40, 6:45; Thu 3:20, 6:45, 9:45

SEVEN POUNDS (14A, mature themes) No passes Fri-Tue 1:10, 4:10, 7:10, 10:10; Wed 1:20, 4:10, 7:10, 10:10; Thu 4:10, 7:10, 10:10

BOLT IN DISNEY DIGITAL 3D (G) Digital Presentation, Remastered 3d Fri-Tue 1:10, 3:40, 6:45, 9:45; Wed 1:10, 3:40, 6:45, 9:45; Thu 3:35, 7:00

THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL (PG) No passes Fri-Tue 12:00, 2:30, 4:45, 7:15, 9:45; Wed 12:00, 2:30, 4:45, 7:15, 9:45; Thu 4:45, 7:15, 9:45

AUSTRALIA (PG, violence, language may offend) Fri, Sun-Tue 1:50, 4:15, 6:45, 9:15; Sat 4:15, 6:45, 9:15

THE TALE OF DESPEREAUX

7:15, 9:45, Wed 12:50, 3:10, 7:15;

DTS Digital Thu 3:30, 7:10, 9:30

QUANTUM OF SOLACE (14A) DTS Digital, Stadium Seating Fri 6:35, 9:10; Sat-Tue 12:40, 3:15, 6:35, 9:10; Wed 12:40, 3:15, 6:35

TWILIGHT (PG, violence, language may offend) Fri 6:30, 9:15; Sat-Tue 12:30, 3:20, 6:30, 9:15; Wed 12:35, 3:20, 6:30

FOUR CHRISTMASSES (PG, crude content, language may offend) DTS Digital Fri-Tue 12:45, 3:25, 6:55, 9:20; Wed 12:45, 3:25, 6:55

THE CURIOUS CASE OF BENJAMIN BUTTON (PG, not recommended for young children, coarse language) No passes, Dolby Stereo Digital Thu 3:40, 8:00

BEDTIME STORIES (G) No passes, Digital Presentation Thu 7:00, 9:30

VALKYRIE (PG, violence, coarse language) DTS Digital, Stadium Seating Thu 3:40, 8:00

DOUBT (STC) DTS Digital Thu 3:10, 6:55, 9:20

THE READER (18A, sexual content) DTS Digital Thu 3:15, 6:30, 9:10

CLAYTON 10

4211 139 Ave, 720.172.7000

MADAGASCAR: ESCAPE 2 AFRICA (G) Fri 4:15, 6:35, 8:50; Sat-Tue 2:00, 4:15, 6:35, 8:50; Wed 2:00, 4:15, 6:35

QUANTUM OF SOLACE (14A) Fri 4:25, 6:55, 9:15; Sat-Tue 1:35, 4:25, 6:55, 9:15; Wed 1:35, 4:25, 6:55

TWILIGHT (PG, violence) Fri 4:10, 6:50, 9:25; Sat-Tue 1:30, 4:10, 6:50, 9:25; Wed 1:30, 4:10, 6:50; Thu 6:30

BOLT IN DISNEY DIGITAL 3D (G) Digital Presentation Fri 4:40, 7:00, 9:20; Sat-Tue 2:10, 4:40, 7:00, 9:20; Wed 2:10, 4:40, 7:00

FOUR CHRISTMASSES (PG, crude content, language may offend) Fri 4:30, 7:25, 9:35; Sat-Tue 1:25, 4:30, 7:25, 9:35; Wed 1:25, 4:30, 7:25, 9:35

TRANSPORTER 3 (14A) Fri 4:45, 7:15; Sat-Tue 1:50, 4:45, 7:15; Wed 1:50, 4:45, 7:00

NOTHING LIKE THE HOLIDAYS (PG, coarse language) Fri-Tue 9:40

THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL (PG) No passes Fri 4:50, 7:20, 9:50; Sat-Sun 1:10, 4:50, 7:20, 9:50; Wed 1:10, 4:50, 7:05; Thu 5:00, 7:25, 9:50

YES MAN (14A) No passes Fri, Thu 4:35, 7:10, 9:45; Sat-Tue 1:40, 4:35, 7:10, 9:45; Wed 1:40, 4:35, 7:05

THE TALE OF DESPEREAUX (G) No passes Fri-Tue 12:10, 2:20, 4:35, 7:00, 9:10; Wed 12:10, 2:20, 4:35, 7:00, 9:10; Thu 4:35, 7:00, 9:10

SEVEN POUNDS (14A, mature themes) No passes Fri-Tue 1:10, 4:10, 7:10, 10:10; Wed 1:20, 4:10, 7:10, 10:10; Thu 4:10, 7:10, 10:10

MARLEY AND ME (PG) No passes Thu 4:10, 6:50, 9:35

THE CURIOUS CASE OF BENJAMIN BUTTON (PG, not recommended for young children, coarse language) No passes Thu 4:50, 8:30

THE SPIRIT (STC) Thu 4:40, 7:15, 9:45

VALKYRIE (PG, violence, coarse language) Thu 3:50, 6:35, 9:20

BEDTIME STORIES (G) Digital Presentation, No passes Thu 4:25, 7:00, 9:30

DUCCAN CINEMA-CAMROSE

2000 N. 10th Avenue, 720.410.0550

YES MAN (14A) Fri-Tue 7:10, 9:15, Sat, Sun, Tue 2:10

THE TALE OF DESPEREAUX (G) Fri-Tue 7:00, 9:00; Sat, Sun, Tue 2:00

SEVEN POUNDS (14A, mature themes) Fri-Tue 6:50, 9:10; Sat, Sun, Tue 1:50

THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL (PG) Fri-Tue 7:05, 9:05; Sat, Sun, Tue 2:05

FOUR CHRISTMASSES (PG, crude content, language may offend) Fri-Tue 7:20, 9:20; Sat, Sun, Tue 2:20

GALAXY-SHERWOOD PARK

2000 Sherwood Drive, 720.410.0550

THE TALE OF DESPEREAUX (G) No passes Fri-Tue 1:40, 4:10, 6:40, 9:10; Wed 1:40, 4:10, 6:40, 9:10; Thu 4:10, 6:40, 9:10

SEVEN POUNDS (14A, mature themes) No passes Fri-Tue 1:40, 4:10, 6:40, 9:10; Wed 1:40, 4:10, 6:40, 9:10; Thu 4:10, 6:40, 9:10

YES MAN (14A) No passes Fri, Thu 4:30, 7:30, 10:10; Sat-Tue 1:10, 4:30, 7:30, 10:10; Wed 1:10, 4:30, 7:30

THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD

STILL (PG) No passes Fri 4:00, 6:50, 9:40; Sat-Tue 1:00, 4:00, 6:50, 9:45; Wed 1:00, 4:00, 6:50; Thu 4:00, 6:40, 9:20

FOUR CHRISTMASSES (PG, crude content, language may offend) Fri 4:15, 7:40, 10:15; Sat

AUDITIONS

for the 2009/2010 Birmingham Conservatory for Classical Theatre will be held in February 2009 in Vancouver, Calgary, Winnipeg, Toronto and Halifax.

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Young professional actors are sought who have completed an accredited theatre training program and who show strong potential for, and are passionate about, classical theatre. Preference is given to those who have worked for two years after graduating.

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- resumé
- letter telling us why you wish to participate

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For more information, visit
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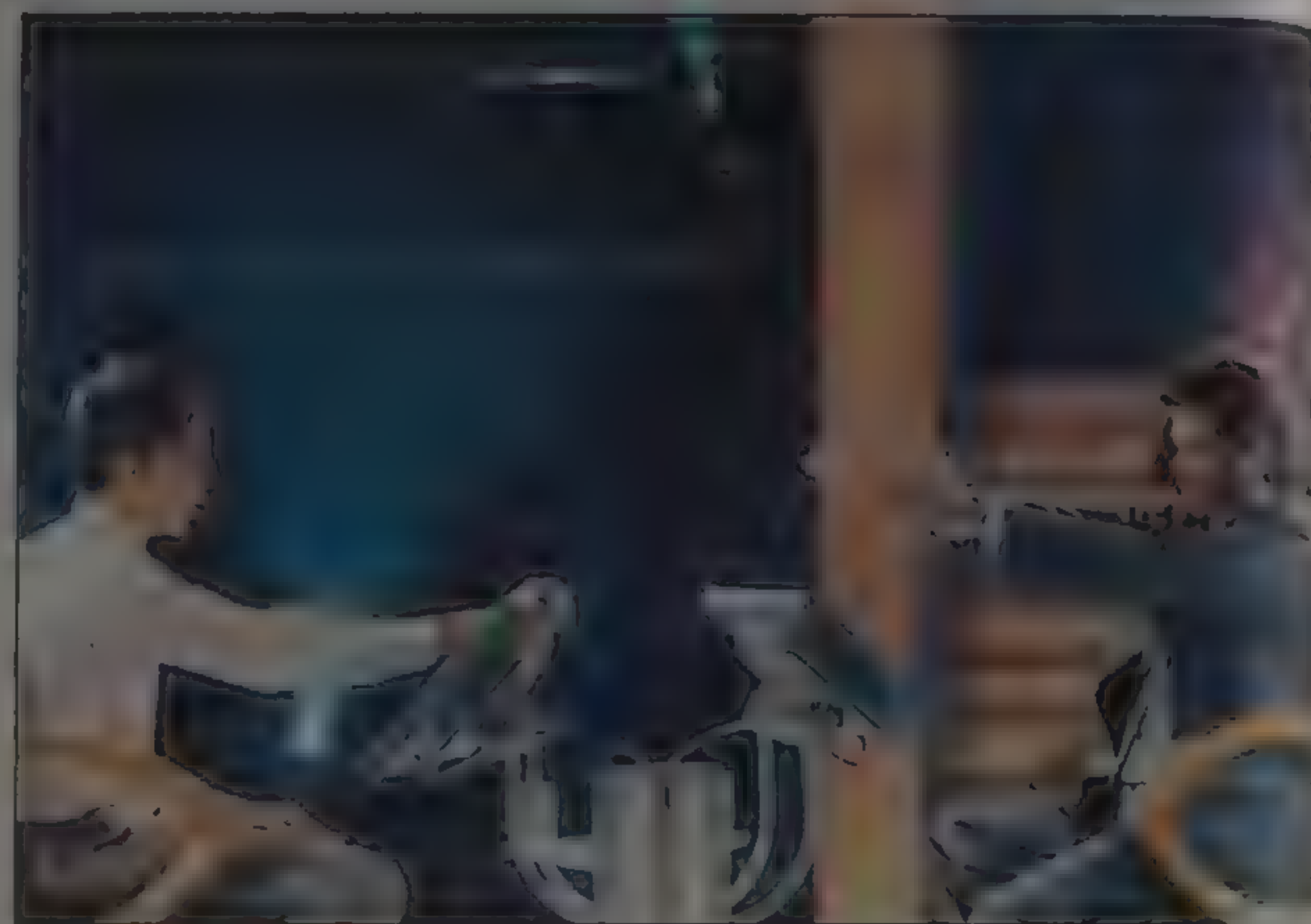
Slumdog Millionaire entertains, but it's nothing you haven't seen

BRYAN BIRTLES / bryan@vancouverweekly.com

Despite the intense hype that surrounds Danny Boyle's *Slumdog Millionaire*, it's not much more than a typical boy-meets-girl flick. There is certainly an enticing veneer of the "mysterious east" which shrouds the film thanks to its setting in the colourful slums of Bombay/Mumbai, and the way that that setting translates into the idea and dialogue of the film—such as the ideas about destiny which lay claim to a distinctly Indian perspective, for example—but there is nothing that sets this film particularly apart from any that have come before it.

It certainly is interesting, however, and for the most part eminently watchable. The slums of India, which look like they have been built upon piles of multi-coloured garbage in the multiple and thrilling chase scenes, nearly have a starring role in the movie. The underground is always bubbling to the surface in places like this, seems to be the message, and even good people such as protagonist Jamal Malik (Dev Patel) can't help but be pulled down into the mire at times if they want to survive. Not only can they survive, however, they can have a life as interesting and rewarding as any other.

SLUMDOG MILLIONAIRE is really the story of Jamal, told through his answers to questions on the Indian version of *Who Wants to be a Millionaire*? When this "slum dog" contestant inexplicably makes it to the



OPENS FRI, DEC 19
SLUMDOG MILLIONAIRE
DIRECTED BY DANNY BOYLE
WRITTEN BY SIMON MONTEY
STARRING DEV PATEL, FREIDA PINTO,
ANIL KAPOOR, IRREAN KHAN
★★

last round of the game, he is arrested and the movie follows his interrogation, wherein he must explain to a good cop/dumb cop team how he came to know the answers. Through each explanation—and by the end, you realize that there sure were a lot of questions that one needed to go through to win on *Millionaire*—the audience gets the story of Jamal's life.

Jamal's mother dies and he and

his brother are left to fend for themselves. They meet Latika (Freida Pinto) and Jamal feels they are destined to be together, but a series of unfortunate events leads to them being separated. Jamal then devotes his life to finding her, struggling through a myriad of challenges—including a brother's betrayal, battles against gangsters, and a crappy job at a call centre—until, miracle of miracles, they end up together. It's not that the events recounted in the film aren't touching—and through the film's structure they are explored in a visually appealing way—it's just that everything about the film seems so telegraphed from the beginning. ▽

4 GOLDEN GLOBE AWARD NOMINATIONS
BEST PICTURE OF THE YEAR
BEST DIRECTOR BEST SUPPORTING ACTRESS BEST SCREENPLAY

A MASTERPIECE!

A WORK OF OVERWHELMING ACCOMPLISHMENT
THAT WILL BE ONE OF THE MOST UPLIFTING
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No expectation can prepare you for The Reader's emotional impact. The acting is superb. Kate Winslet gives an Oscar-caliber performance that is one of the most devastating of her career. I can think of no praise high enough for Director Stephen Daldry.
I CAN'T WAIT TO SEE IT AGAIN."

-Los Angeles Times

A SERIOUS CONTENDER FOR
BEST PICTURE OF THE YEAR

Alternately despairing, distraught and defeated, Kate Winslet allows conflicted emotions to play across her face as she struggles with the life and death decision of which secrets to reveal and which to hide away."

"A TALE OF EROTICISM, SECRECY AND GUILT
THAT'S BOUND TO STIR DISCUSSION."

CRITICS' CHOICE AWARD NOMINATIONS
BEST PICTURE OF THE YEAR

3 **BEST PICTURE OF THE YEAR**
BEST SUPPORTING ACTRESS - KATE WINSLET

"ONE OF THE
BEST PICTURES OF THE YEAR!"
-NYC ROLL CALL, JAMES HAN



KATE WINSLET RALPH FIENNES

The Reader

Unlock the mystery.

EXCLUSIVE ENGAGEMENT STARTS FRIDAY, DECEMBER 25TH! CITY CENTRE 9

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EXCLUSIVE ENGAGEMENT STARTS FRIDAY, DECEMBER 25TH! CITY CENTRE 9

FILM CAPSULES

EXTRACTED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

crimson, skin-tight, crushed velvet dress and some sort of corset, or at least a push-up bra. In another she dons thigh-high boots and ass-hugging pants. She uses her sexuality to mystify and manipulate those whom she figures can advance her plot to provoke a new war between the Nohrins and Lockni on false terms. Again, I wonder how much a six-year-old will respond to such undertones, but for parents a little taste of Mrs Robinson should help to pass the time.

NOTHING LIKE THE HOLIDAYS

DIRECTED BY ALFREDO DE VILLA
WRITTEN BY ALISON SWAN, RICK NAJERA
STARRING FREDDY RODRIGUEZ, ELIZABETH PEÑA
★★★

JONATHAN BUSCH / jonathan@vancouverweekly.com

There's nothing like a Puerto Rican version of *The Family Stone*. The aforementioned holiday drama, featuring a household of twisted issues from terminal cancer to gay marriage filtered through the uber-whiteness of Sarah Jessica Parker and Diane Keaton, was a hit in so far as it was easily diagnosed; one

merely had to blink at the problems to solve them. One might say the same for *Nothing like the Holidays*, an underdog festive round-up of bickering parents and their grown-up children with one apparent twist—the casting of almost every Latin American actor you can shake a stick at, minus America Ferrera.

Freddy Rodriguez stars as Jesse, a soldier returning from Iraq, who realizes that the war at home might be worse than the one he just came from. His mother Anna (Elizabeth Peña) quickly announces plans to separate from his father, bodega grocery store owner Edy (Alfred Molina). His brother Mauricio (John Leguizamo) and his Jewish, business-minded wife Sarah (Debra Messing) front their jet-set lifestyle, all the while withholding contempt for one another over the decision to make a baby. Meanwhile, his sister Roxanna (Vanessa Ferlito) stresses over her modest career in Hollywood, yearning for a satisfying change. Last but not least, Marissa (Melonie Diaz), the girl Jesse once loved but left behind to fight for freedom, has a child and a new boyfriend.

Like *Stone*, the film focuses on family as what makes or breaks the individual and collective sanity of the characters, moving between the frantic and tender at the speed of light. Aside from Jesse's time

in uniform and a family friend's former gang involvement, *Nothing like the Holidays* barely addresses any hardminded contemporary issues and should feel simple-minded. But it's the Latino element that begs the question, suggesting that each issue is informed by a unique cultural perspective. Despite its politically correct title, the celebration of the birth of Christ plays a significant role, from Anna's religious piety to the entire neighborhood skipping down the street to "O Come All Ye Faithful." Both *Stone* and the god-awful *Love, Actually* refused to tap into that uncomfortable Jesus vibe that deters audiences bent on the togetherness and stuffing oneself part of the holidays. One can't help but leave the theatre unsettled, that declares the warm fuzziness of the season a difficult sentiment to enjoy.

Strong performances also help *Nothing like the Holidays* through the storm, gathering a slew of indie-familiar faces like Rodriguez, Jay Hernandez and the smouldering Ferlito (each of which appeared in last year's *Grindhouse*). Peña and Molina, once smooth young stars themselves in oddball hits like *Lone Star* and *The Perez Family*, suggest that the Screen Actor's Guild has plenty of forgotten veterans waiting for roles as good as these ones. ▽

Dial 780 for the Operators

Local band picks up the phone for a couple more nights

CAROLYN NIKODYM / carolyn@vueweekly.com

In the first three years of life, so much is learned, from the fundamentals of walking and talking to more complex manoeuvres of

the Operators' short three years, the band went from farting around with a four-track and learning new instruments to playing gigs with American ska-reggae veteran King Django. And then, almost three years to the day after the five skanksters joined forces, the party just stopped. The Halloween scare of 2004 turned into a long-term hiatus, with each of the Operators going on to pursue other musical paths.

Could the two gigs planned for this weekend (December 19 and 20) mean a new beginning for Eric Budd, Mike Garth, Bradley Nattrass, Chris Bateman and Ian Witham? Well, they aren't exactly saying. Budd would only allow these words on the subject:

"One of the nice things about these shows coming up is that by practicing and rehearsing for these shows, it's kind of rekindled that feeling of why we did it in the first place and why we're doing it again," he says. "You're not going to get rich off this shit, and if you think you are, you're delusional. It's underground music, it's people's music."

2007

Budd, Garth, Nattrass and Konrad Andrelunas (Wednesday Night

PREVIEW

THE OPERATORS

FRI, DEC 19 (8 PM)
WITH WEDNESDAY NIGHT HEROES, LET'S DANCE,
THE OLD WIVES
NEW CITY, \$10

SAT, DEC 20 (8 PM)
WITH 40 THIEVES, THE CITY STREETS
THE ARTERY, \$10

Heroes) say goodbye to summer out by a lakeside with a four-track, and lay down music. Through friends Aaron Getz and Jon Dunbar, who had shows on CJSR, the resulting recording gets airplay. That, coupled with sharing hosting duties at the old New City's Rub-a-Dub Thursdays, has folks convinced that there was an actual band behind the music.

"We're, like, 'Yo, we don't even have a rhythm section yet.' We hadn't even met Chris and Ian at that time. It was just kind of, like, 'Oh, this is awesome, when are you guys playing a show?' And we don't even have a band," Budd explains. "It's kind of like positive peer pressure."

The pressure mounts and in November, the Operators are born

2002

The early year sees the band working hard to learn new instruments and solidifying its reggae and ska sound. For its first show in May, the Operators share a bill with Chris Murray and the Kingpins. In August, the band

heads back out for a second lakeside recording session, writing the songs "4 Ways" and "Saint Joseph." A fall gig at the Sugarbowl starts a street party and the band's "Hawaii 84" gets picked up for Stomp Record's All Skanadian Club 4

PHOTOGRAPH BY [unreadable]



40 Thieves play an honest tune

CAROLYN NIKODYM / carolyn@vueweekly.com

40 Thieves didn't mean to leave Edmonton without dropping its shiny, new CD for local fans first. The guys didn't mean for Toronto to get it first

It seems, though, that a band of some other thieves made off with the address numbers on the front of the band house, thwarting the delivery of CDs until mere hours before the guys set out east. It all works out, though. Not only do 40 Thieves get to release

PREVIEW

SAT, DEC 20 (10 PM)
40 THIEVES
WITH THE OPERATORS, THE CITY STREETS
THE ARTERY, \$10

the self-titled album in the company of friends and good-time bands the City Streets and the Operators, but the guys also still have something substantial to show those folks back East

"[Omens], the EP we recorded, it took really long, and it was supposed

to be way longer and a couple of the songs we recorded for it, we ended up re-recording ... I didn't want to play Toronto for the first time and have that as a representation of us," guitarist Caleb Neumeier says over the phone from a tour stop in the Big Smoke. "Because the difference in quality of where we were two years ago and where we are now is night and day."

Neumeier is chatty after braving a long, snow-drippy drive from Thunder Bay to Toronto, but his pleasure at being alive is brought on just as much by character as it is by a white-knuckle drive. He's just pleased as punch to be doing what he loves: playing in a band.

THE FEELING IS CONTAGIOUS. It pervades 40 Thieves' infectious punky grooves,

and if the band had to pin itself to any one purpose, it may very well be to get people up and shaking it. This fact has won the local outfit—made up of Neumeier, bassist Lee Klipperstein and drummer Grant Callaghan—flattering companions to Our Mercury

"When we first started out, the band was very hesitant about being compared, because we didn't want to be seen as Soul Asylum to the Replacements," Neumeier says. "But we're not. It comes from the same place, but it's different. It's our take."

"With Our Mercury, it was the energy, it was these three guys putting their heart into their songs and music. And when people say that, I think it's a compliment," he adds. "Ben [Stevenson], from Our Mercury, said,

"When you perform, people paid money to see you. You owe them a performance. That's your job."

The audience, after all, is an integral member of any successful band, and as obvious as it may sound, it's refreshing to see or hear musicians who really just want their fans to have fun.

"The draw isn't to pretend that we're some musically progressive band, but that we deliver with what we do. It depends on how you judge," Neumeier says. "I like music as a soundtrack, but what really has changed my life is music as a message, and it hides behind a melody. You can say very potent things, when you're music's catchy, that are 10 times more effective than trying to pretend you're progressive." ▀

The column of Misfits toys

Gifts for everyone from punks to puppy dogs

MUSIC ENTER SANDOR

STEVEN SANDOR
STEVEN@VUEWEEKLY.COM

As CD sales fall, more and more bands are relying on branded merchandise for revenues. It used to be that Christmas was a time for box sets—now, for forward-thinking merchandise merchants, it's a time for dolls, keychains, jackets and lunchboxes. T-shirts are just the entry point for bands looking to increase revenues through the sale of stuff rather than music.

And, in time for the last-second shopper, I wanted to bang out a short primer of some of the more, well, let's call them "unique" rock items out there. I don't know if the fact these items are even being produced is marketing genius or a sign of just how desperate the industry has become. After all, most of the major labels now have merchandising wings, something they wouldn't have dreamed about a decade ago.

Well, here's to what's out there.

A Misfits fiend mask. Yeah, you've got a Misfits shirt, maybe even a Misfits toque. That fiend skull logo is probably the most famous brand in punk history. But, for the real Misfits fan—or a future bank robber—a full Misfits fiend mask is an awesome accessory. About US\$19. (Rockabilia.com/category.php?cat=2481)

Remember the cover of Sonic Youth's *Goo*? That's where the character in the Raymond Pettibon comic panel utters the lines, "I stole my sister's boyfriend. It was all whirlwind, heat and flash. Within a week we killed my parents and hit the road." Well, how creepy would it be to have your baby wear it? Yup. *Goo* baby apparel. US\$18. But, I prefer the Sonic Youth skateboard, US\$45 (Sonicyouth.com/store/index.html for both items.)

There's no doubt that the guys in Metallica are the kings of merch. Just one visit to their online store and you'll find action figures and calendars, but my favourites are the Christmas ornament and the stocking. Both are done up in black with silver ninja stars, a la the cover to *Death Magnetic*

Ridiculous. The ornament is US \$15.99 at store.metallica.com/store/store.asp?nProductId=600241. Better than the Yukon Cornelius that you might have hanging from your tree.

AC/DC has a "Holiday Gift Department" at its online store. The Aussie rockers turned my head with a line of clothing for dogs. Yup, for the dog-owner who has everything, there's "Devil Doggie Flames Hoodie." It's red, with flames emblazoned on the side, to make your dog look like a hot rod. And, best of all, horns where the head goes. Look to spend just US\$6 on this (Acdc.shop.musictoday.com/Product.aspx?c=149_15417&pc=DCCM70)

Weezer's online store has lunchboxes, with artwork of the band done Saturday-morning-cartoon style, for the hipster who loves retro from his or her childhood. Will rest nicely in the basket of a Schwinn bike. Less than US\$7 (Cinderblock.com/bands/product-details.aspx?product=7321&category=41.)

Steven Sandor is a former editor-in-chief of *Vue Weekly*, now an editor and author living in Toronto

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HAVEN SOCIAL CLUB Souljah Yah Sundays, 8pm; \$10 (door/\$5 (student)/\$5 (restaurant/pub employees with pay stub)

HULBERT'S Sunday Songwriter's Stage, 7pm, \$5/person minimum charge

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NEW CITY Wednesday Night Heroes: E-Town Beatdown, Raygun Cowboys, The Intensives, all ages

NEWCASTLE PUB Sunday acoustic open stage with Willy James and Crawford, 3-6pm

NEW CITY Open mic Sunday hosted by Ben Disaster, 9pm (sign-up), no cover

O'BRYEN'S Open mic jam with Robb Angus (the Wheat Pool)

ON THE ROCKS Shocker Sundays with King Muskala

OSCAR'S PUB Open stage Sundays hosted by Chris Wynters of Captain Tractor, 8-11pm

CLASSICAL

MUTTART HALL-ALBERTA College: Sarah Ho (piano), 7-8pm; \$30

DJS

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NEW CITY SUNDAY SOUNDS Christmas fundraiser for the youth

PEASANT NEW COMMUNITY HALL Acoustic instrumental old time fiddle jam hosted by the Wild Rose

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1001-1003 • MACLAB CENTRE-LEDUC 1001-1003
1001-1003 • MUTTART HALL-ALBERTA COLLEGE 1001-1003
1001-1003 • NEWCASTLE PUB 1001-1003
1001-1003 • NORTH GLENORA HALL 1001-1003
1001-1003 • ROCKS 1001-1003
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1001-1003 • TOUCH OF CLASS 1001-1003
1001-1003 • WILD WEST SALOON 1001-1003
1001-1003 • YESTERDAYS PUB 1001-1003

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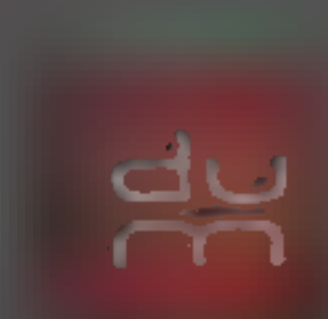
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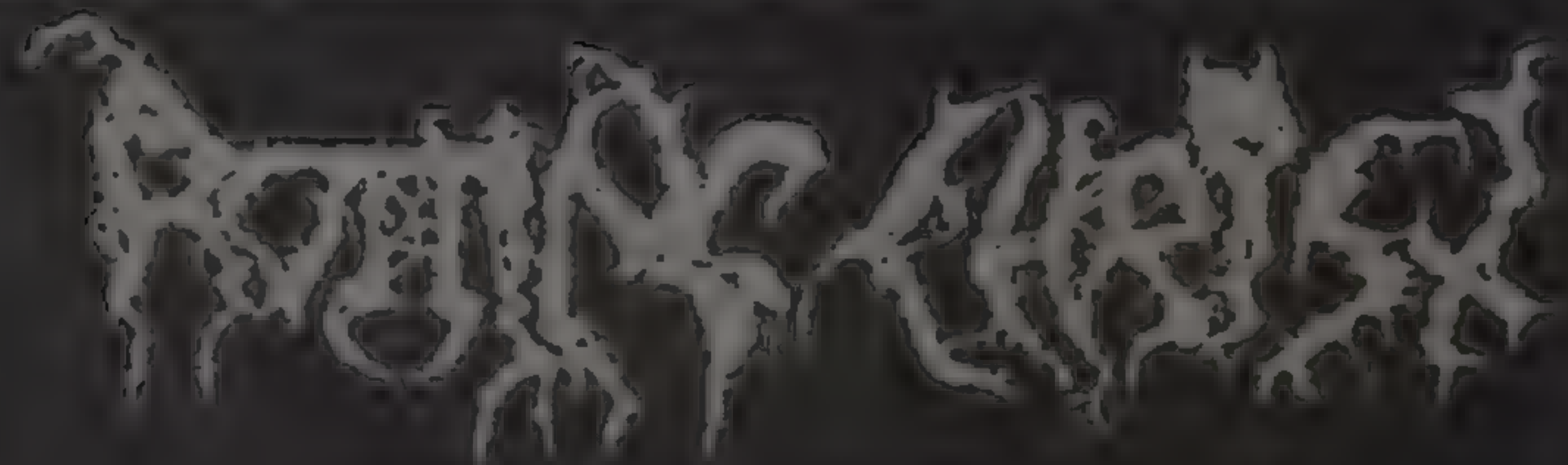
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Let the music do the talking

The AMGC grinds it all up and spits out its own sound

BY BEN MUNRO / eden@vuwweekly.com

It's a question that bands have had to deal with pretty much from the beginning of time: what do you want to sound like? Like it or not, there's often a genuine need for some sort of short-cut and when it comes to describing a group's sound to a complete stranger, Bob Keelaghan, guitarist/vocalist with the **Agnostic Mountain Gospel Choir**, there's a relatively concise description that he likes to fall back on. "I'd probably just say fucked-up country blues," Keelaghan chuckles over the phone. "The thing we've always had since we've taken the band seriously is the idea of trying to be true to tradition, but without copying it, putting your own spin on it."

And the quartet certainly has put its own spin on an old and creaking sound over the course of three albums and many a gig over the past few years. It's a sound born of a wide range of influences, from the river to the mountains to the prairies, pulling bits from years long past and nailing them all together to present a sound that sounds remarkably big for just four guys hammering away on their instruments.

"Once we were resolved to being a four-piece, I think we were just of the mind of trying to get the most out of it that we could," Keelaghan explains. "You just arrange things right with your instruments and you sing things right and hopefully it does sound big." The guitarist says that the Choir's songwriting process generally begins with either himself or guitarist/bassist/vocalist Judd Palmer bringing an idea in to the group. From there, though, the approach varies. Judd is usually sort of more

PREVIEW **FRI, DEC 19 (7:30 PM)**
AGNOSTIC MOUNTAIN GOSPEL CHOIR
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towards the jamming things out side of things," Keelaghan says. "He'll have some ideas about what to do sound wise, but he's pretty good with just saying, 'OK, here's my song. What are you gonna do to it?' Whereas when I bring something in I've usually got a bit more of a sound in my head and I'll try to bring that out by maybe saying to someone else, 'Why don't you play this,' or 'Why don't you try playing that?'"

WHEN ANY GROUP gets into collaborative territory, so much of the end result depends upon the chemistry between the various members. For the Choir, that chemistry has undergone a change on its latest album, *Ten Thousand*, the band's first with drummer Peter Balkwill. The shift was not in an entirely unexpected direction, though.

"He was initially the first drummer in the band," Keelaghan says, explaining that Balkwill was instrumental in putting the band together originally. "And then just short of a year in, just as the band was starting to get going and gel and that, he took a teaching position out of town and then left the band, and then when Jay [Woolley] left we just sort of asked him to come back."

"He's got a different style to percussion," Keelaghan adds. "It's like any time when a band goes through a membership change, someone plays differently so it affects things in subtle ways. It'd be like replacing a part on your car—

depending on what model you use it might run better or it might not."

That's a pretty exact analogy, really, but Keelaghan goes one better in an attempt to describe how things have changed since Balkwill's return to the fold.

"I always think about music in terms of communication," he reasons. "It's the same way you'd have a conversation with somebody: you have these common interests or common areas of knowledge that you draw from and when it works you have an exchange going—one person is informing the other, or you both walked in on a subject and you're discussing it, you're exploring it, and someone else comes in who knows something else that's related and suddenly it takes the conversation in a different direction."

"I started to think about that more when I started doing more writing," he continues. "When you're writing something you're conscious of what you're communicating, what you're putting across, and I don't think music is any different in that respect. The really good musicians know what they're communicating, they know what they're putting across and they know how to put it across. A really good band speaks well—it's like a really good person is saying, it hits home and they say it with passion, whereas there are those bands that you think are kind of innocuous, or just bands that you don't think are really saying anything or they're just saying shit you don't care about or they're just restating something that you've heard a million times before." ▼

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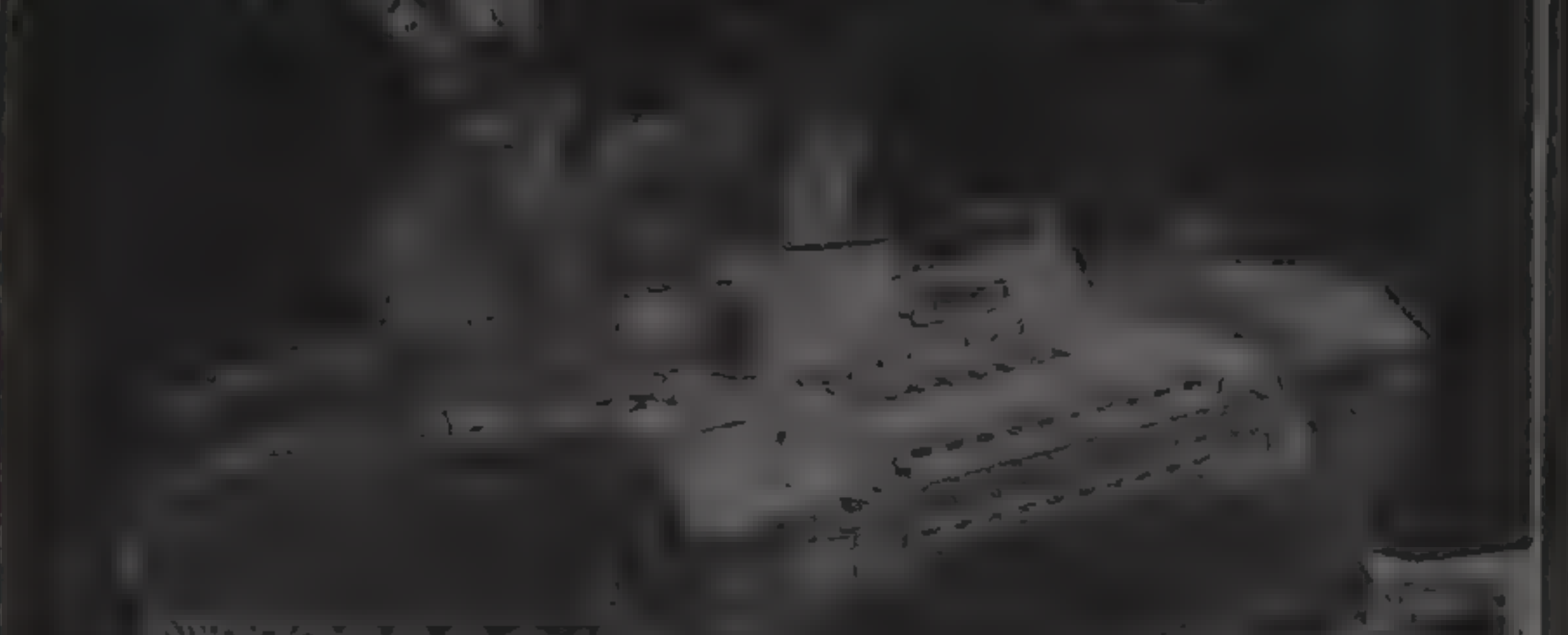
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The hard way

JAMES STEWART / jstewart@vancouverweekly.com

The Fire Seeds don't always do things the hard way, honest. But take guitarist Ross VanEldik's accident with a utility knife that ended with a near severing of his index finger and the year-long hiatus that followed ("We called him Django," chuckles drummer Terrence Katerynych, referring to Django Reinhardt, the jazz guitarist who played with two partially paralyzed fingers), the untimely line-up changes and long-delayed recordings, and you've got enough reason to wonder just where the voodoo doll is, and who's holding the pins.

Gigging as a three-piece for years, the Fire Seeds added lead vocalist Marc Mercier when their original plan of 'whoever writes it, sings it' became too distracting. As they continued to develop their funk-influenced rock sound as a foursome, the band was

PREVIEW

THE FIRE SEEDS

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forced into another personnel change. Luckily, when original bassist Shane Larmand left the band, they didn't have to look far for a replacement. "Humbert [Meinderos] was actually working as a technician in the studio where we were recording," Katerynych explains. "He liked the songs, and he had a positive attitude and a great knowledge about sound and recording. He's also very professional, so that's nice too."

WHILE THE TRACKING of the band's debut self-titled record came about

relatively quickly, Katerynych admits the entire process of finishing the album ended up taking a year and a half.

"We were just a little ... disorganized," Katerynych laughs. "But we were also trying to pay for the record with money we'd make from gigs; it took a while."

The record features the Fire Seeds in the group's original three-piece incarnation, but Katerynych notes that the band still plays all the songs with the new line-up, and now have over 30 original songs ready to drop at any given show.

"We just really love playing the music that we want to play," he says. "It's all about having fun and keeping a positive attitude. There's a lot of music pandering to teenage angst out there, and that's just not what we're about at all. We like to think we make music for adults." ▽

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THE OPERATORS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 37

2003

The Operators spend the year raking in new fans, both in the city and on the West Coast. The *Power Version* EP is recorded with Nik Kozub, and like all Western Canadian bands, they also start compiling stories about touring in winter. February reading week and an uninsulated cargo van make for a frigid first tour to Vancouver and Victoria.

"I remember specifically being in my longjohns and winter gear inside my sleeping bag and still freezing. There was ice on the inside of the van," Budd says. "And it seemed like the most retarded thing to do, to go through the mountains to go play a couple of shows in Vancouver and Victoria. But it worked out. What doesn't kill you makes you stronger."

The Operators make the wise move

to tour East in August, and hook up with Our Mercury, establishing friendship between the two bands - fall house-warming in Oliver with both bands and Whiz Kidz adds fuel to the fan fire.

2004

The punked up ska full-length *S/T* is recorded and released, with Our Mercury and Shout Out Out Out (the band's debut show) sharing the stage. Gigs at the Victoria Ska Fest and the Winnipeg Jazz fest win over King Django, and the Operators are invited to play the veteran's birthday party in New York.

"I was pretty excited at the time because I really looked up to him musically," Budd says. "So playing the guy's birthday was ridiculous."

Come October, it's Halloween and the band goes off, dressed up as WWF superstars. It turns out to be the band's last brainbuster when the guys announce they are tagging out. ▽

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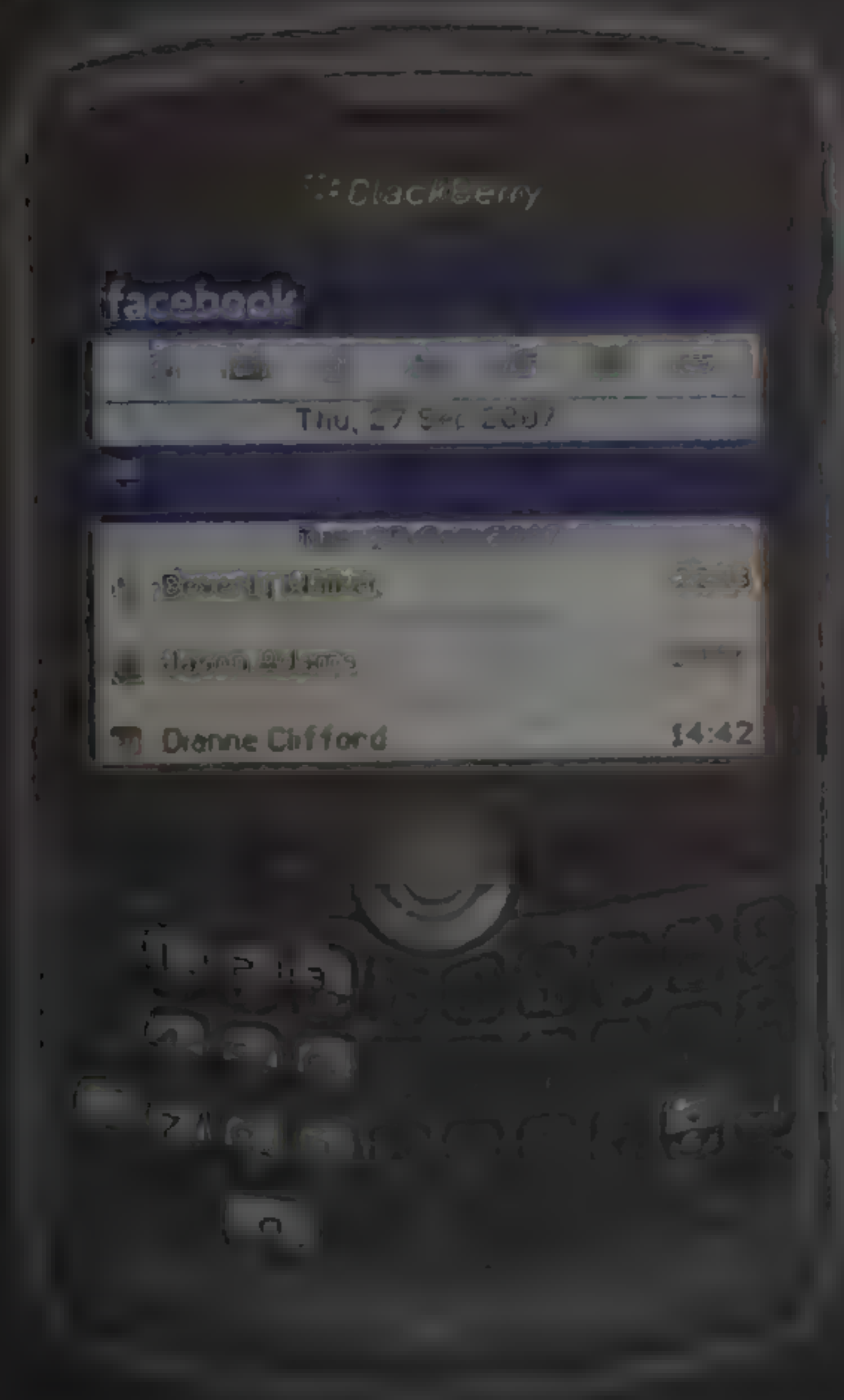
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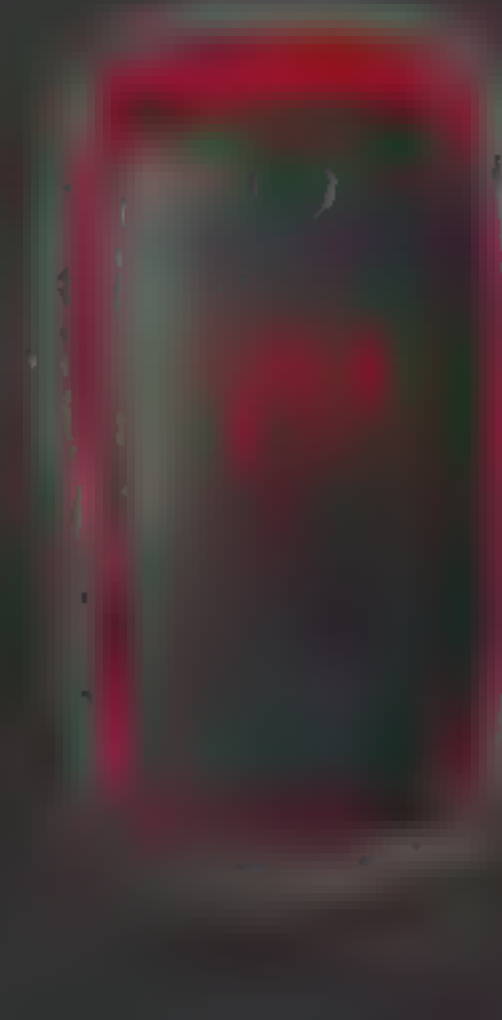
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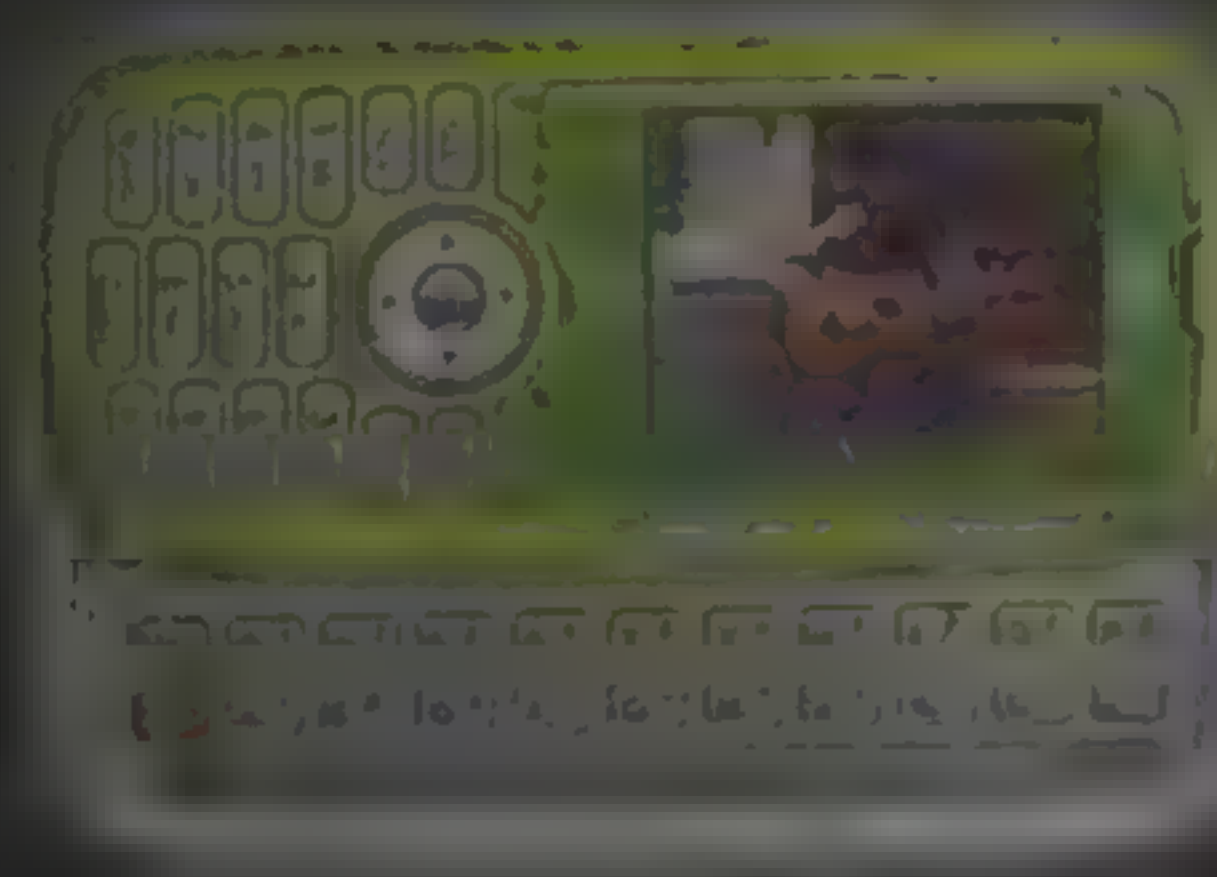
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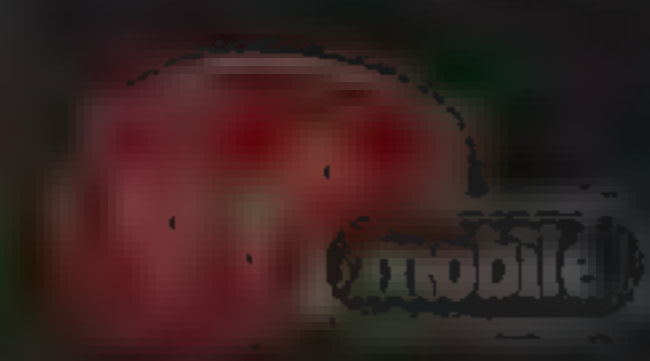
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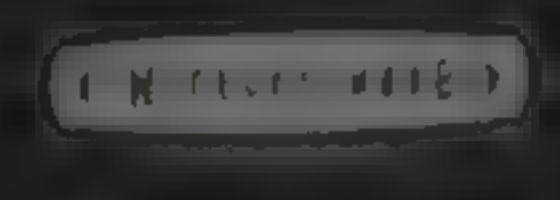
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The Tipz of the Brontoscorpio

BRYAN BIRTLES / bryan@vancouverweekly.com

Bands come together in all sorts of ways. Maybe the members see each other at all the same shows and decide that if they like this kind of music so much, maybe they should play it. Sometimes alcohol is involved, a drunken dare snowballing out of control until you find yourself onstage, petrified because the booze wore off. And, apparently, sometimes postapocalyptic horror theatre is all it takes to get a band together.

At least that's what happened for **Brontoscorpio**. Though members Curtis Ross, Al Hildebrandt and Roz Christian all played in the Frosted Tipz together at one point, Brontoscorpio got the push it needed when Ross and Kristine Nutting collaborated on *Pig*, a play Nutting wrote that was performed at local nudie mecca Chez Pierre.

"We wanted to play metal like we like doing it, but doing it a different way like with machines for drums and wearing ridiculous things and killing each other on stage," explains Ross. "Theatrical is maybe not the right word, but kind of more like a show. I was working with Kristine Nutting on a play she did earlier in the year at the strip club Chez Pierre and it was totally full of blood and boobies and crazy stuff and me and her ended up writing some songs for it and it was really easy and she was into it too, so it kind of ended up turning into this thing we have now."

PREVIEW

TUE, DEC 23 (9PM)
BRONTOSCORPIO
SUNNY VILLAGE VOT. JACK MANNING RD.
PAWNSHOP

And, though he won't reveal many details of what the show entails, any band born of heavy metal, boobies and theatricality

"We wanted to play metal like we like doing it, but doing it a different way like with machines for drums and wearing ridiculous things and killing each other on stage,"

sounds all right with me. Maybe better than all right. But what it needs is a name that imparts the majestic terror that such a band can

instill into its audience. No problem says Ross—this band's name is Brontoscorpio.

"They lived in the ocean in prehistoric times. I think it was from the pre-Cambrian explosion, there were these giant scorpions in the water and they were called brontoscorpio which sounds pretty badass," he says of the four-foot long monsters with stingers the size of a lightbulb and which terrorized prehistoric seas. "I'd been kicking around the idea for awhile and I didn't have anything to do with it, but I thought it'd be a cool band name."

WITH OVER-THE-TOP imagery about nerd-gasm subjects such as D&D even the bandmembers don't know whether their songs are parody or a sincere love letter to their collective idiosyncrasies. It doesn't matter though—you won't even notice because so much sound is coming straight at you, and besides, it could all change next week.

"It's not total dork shit—it's still rocking out," Ross asserts. "I think we're still trying to find our sea legs in terms of what we sound like. Some songs are sort of heavy but there's still a few that venture a little more into pop territory—I wouldn't call them pop songs or anything, but they're a little bit more conventional. And then there's the total headbangers." ▽

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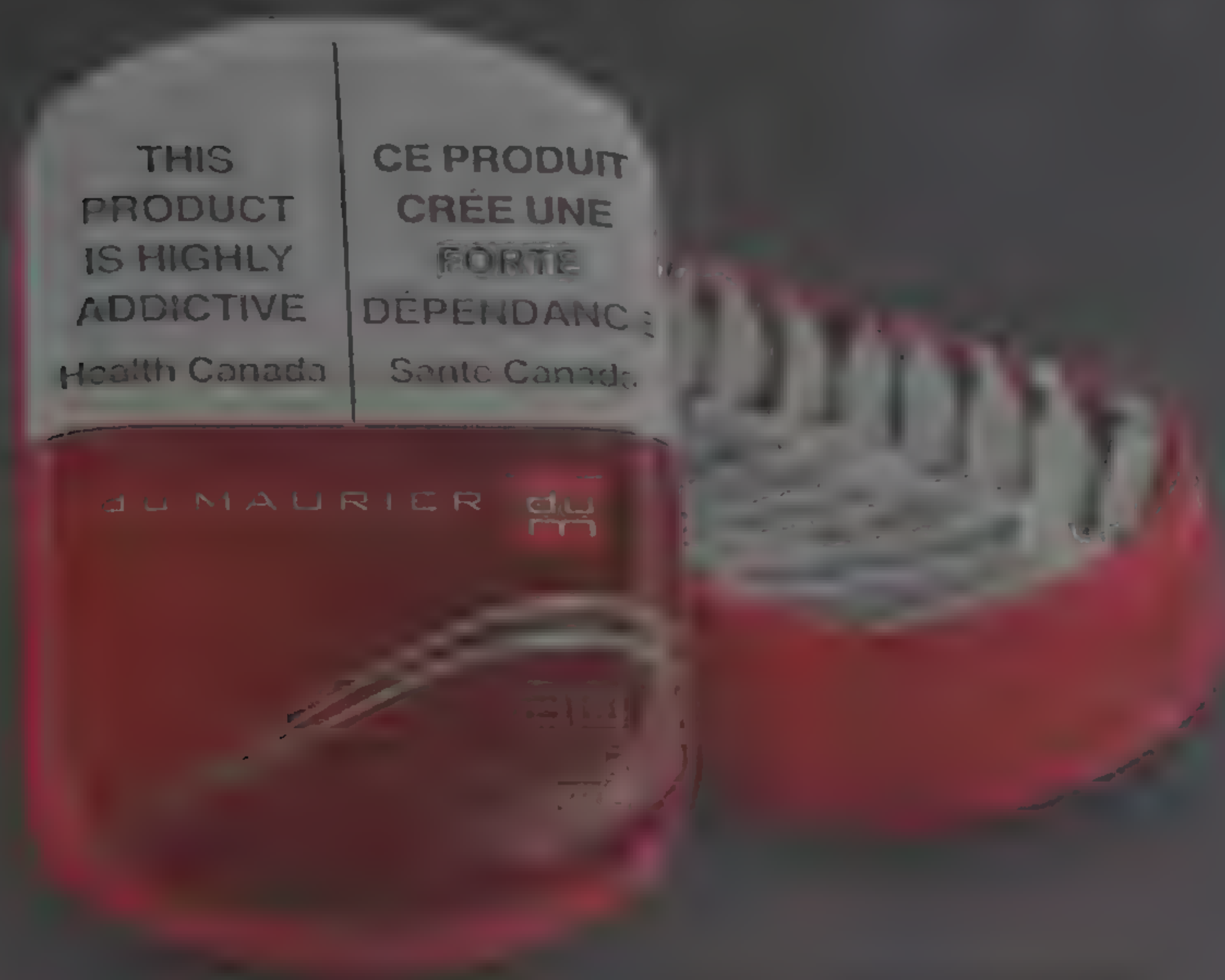
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BEN-DISASTER (LET'S DANCE)

The Welcome Wagon, *Welcome to the Welcome Wagon* (Asthmatic Klitty) A married duo, Reverend Thomas Vito Aiuto and his wife Monique, singing gospel music—that's the most succinct way of describing the Welcome Wagon. But there's so much more to it than that, especially on the duo's debut album, *Welcome to the Welcome Wagon*, which features an assortment of instruments and voices providing subtle accompaniment, and production from Sufjan Stevens.

From the opening strains of the gently-rising "Up On a Mountain," there's a sense that this is an album that is difficult to categorize, as a piano and creaking bench are joined by Monique's wavering voice, Vito singing and playing his guitar along, only to be joined by a choir and horn soon after, the music lifting the spirit with little trouble as melodies and lyrics alike cut close to the bone with uncluttered honesty.

It's gospel, yes, but in much the same way that country and blues singers have been inspired by religion for decade upon decade. The writing is informed by the Bible, but in no way is this music that belongs only within church walls.

The recording of the album, spanning eight years, tells much of the story, having been put to tape in churches, living rooms and studios. There are no walls that can confine the sounds here. The second track, "Sold! To the Nice Rich Man," moves faster, with a slinky electric guitar offering a counterpoint to another chorus of soaring vocals, all bracing

Vito's tale until the song all but explodes into a full-blown sing-a-long celebration of ... something. Like the best music, both secular and not, the Welcome Wagon's songs lie wide open for interpretation. There are no simple answers to be found here, only paths ripe for investigation.

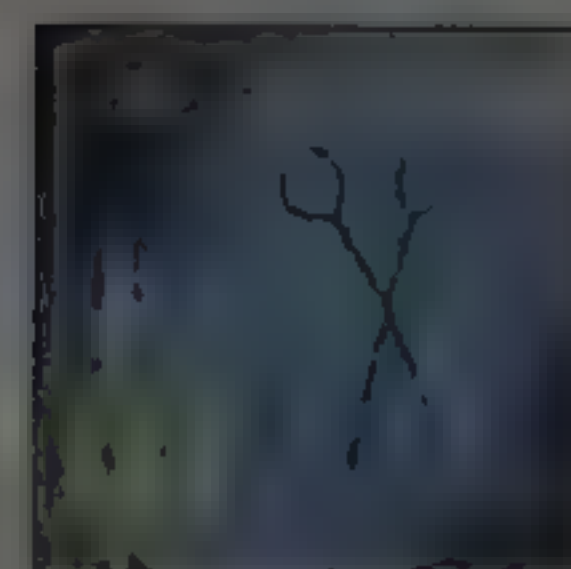
Oh, and utterly fantastic songs, too. Yes, throughout the album the Welcome Wagon—and Stevens, with his focused production—lay down track after track of courageous lyrics and sometimes uplifting, sometimes downcast sounds, revealing hopes and dreams within the songs.

As the album draws on, it becomes clear that even when the songs are less than cheerful, the darkness is somewhere up above the music, not at its heart. Hope and

faith are what lies within the Welcome Wagon's songs, as the duo works its way through the world, often certain, but sometimes only hopeful, that there is a way through the sucking muck that this world's residents must constantly struggle against. Of course, there would be little value in the words if the songs weren't so enticing, quietly emphasizing or loudly proclaiming that hope and faith that is so necessary to the duo.

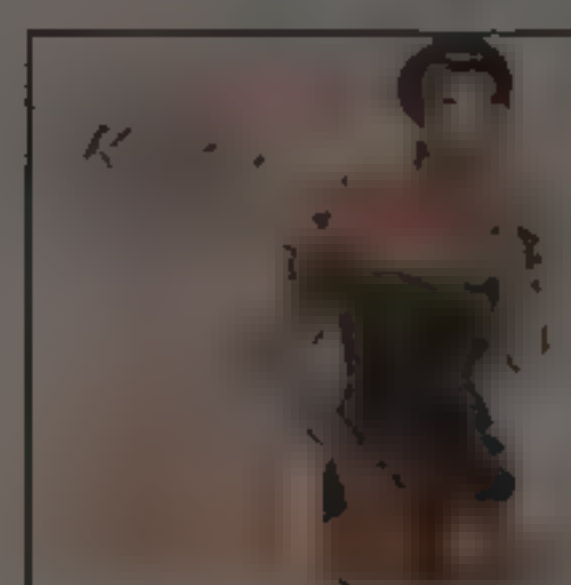
There's a quote on the front cover of *Welcome to the Welcome Wagon*: "Pastor and wife join voices in sacred folk songs for All Ages." This is perhaps the best description for the album, concise rather than bloated, both intriguing and vague enough that it calls one in for a closer look at what lies beneath the covers and inside the grooves of the record. —EDEN MUNRO / eden@vuweekly.com

Catharsis and the Humdrum
Catharsis and the Humdrum (Idols of the Marketplace) What's in a



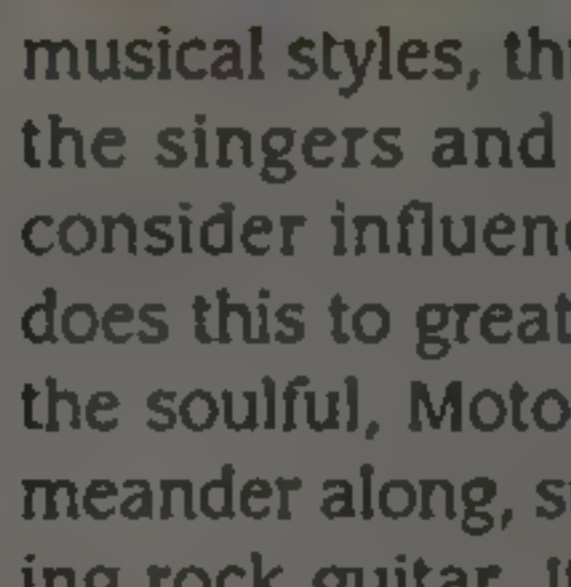
name? Sometimes more than you want. Witness the self-titled debut record of Catharsis and the Humdrum. It's not likely to inspire any catharsis, but it compensates by over-delivering on the boredom. The only things that stand out from the background of ultra-generic pop-rock are the lyrics, which must have been authored under the influence of something illegal. Luckily, the album mix is so bad that it is, at times, impossible to make out the vocals. As long as you don't plan on listening to it, this record is a fine choice. —LEWIS KELLY / lewis@vuweekly.com

Keyshia Cole, *A Different Me* (Geffen) Just in case you were wondering what exactly was going to be different



about Keyshia Cole this time around on the intro to her newest album, she helpfully slinks out "I would like to introduce a sexier side of me" over a '70s let's-get-it-on groove and a fuck-me beat. Then she immediately follows it up with songs like "Make Me Over" "Please Don't Stop" and "Erotic." Ignoring the fact that sexing it up isn't exactly a bold move for an attractive, young female singer, Cole is more than capable of bringing sexy to the front: though her production is a little bit mired in too many contemporary gimmicks, Cole's voice is aural aphrodisiac, slipping comfortably into whatever sultry mode she wants it to. It ain't exactly Marvin Gaye, but there's far worse music to shake the sheets to. —DAVID BERRY / david@vuweekly.com

The Mississippi Kings, *Long Time Comin'* (redCoast) The Mississippi Kings might be a strange name for a group from Hamilton. One thing that isn't strange is these guys' ability to mould and shape their music into a veritable melting pot of



musical styles, thus paying homage to the singers and groups whom they consider influences. And this album does this to great effect. Occasionally the soulful, Motown-flavoured vocals meander along, supported by a growling rock guitar. It's like listening to a less-than-smooth version of Marvin Gaye. Then "This Old Melody" contributes something a bit different to the whole mix through its rural, front-porch feel. And if "All Eyes" were played in a bar, the dance floor would probably be packed; this song certainly doesn't lack energy! Actually, the entire album doesn't. "Shoop (a loving sound)" is the only song that disappoints a bit. Drawing on its Motown influences, this song channels the styles of the Temptations or Aretha Franklin; unfortunately, the vocals in "Shoop" feel sparse, particularly during the chorus. —MARIA KOTOVYCH / maria@vuweekly.com

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A TRANCECORE CHRISTMAS
12/19 - TRANCECORE DJS

Saxanne Potvin, No Love for the Poisonous (Alert) While listening to Potvin's album, I realized that I've seen her perform before—she was one of the five musicians at the Guitar Women concert in town last year. At that show, Potvin

came across as shy and reserved—compared to the others onstage, Potvin didn't come to the crowd much less. Furthermore, I don't remember her bantering much with the other guitarists. Having observed this side of her, I can understand why the soft, quiet tunes on this album are my favourites—I suspect that gentle, understated music just clicks with Potvin's personality and style as an individual. These pieces create a feeling of intimacy between her and the listener, almost like meeting for coffee and having a chat. "Perfect Day," for instance, is a roots-influenced reflection, while the bluesy "No Love For The Poisonous" plays with an earthier sound. Having said all of that, I admire Potvin's ability to incorporate enough variety on this album to keep things interesting. "Who's the Enemy" takes the gift of a political message and wraps it with some funky packaging. And the sassy "Laws of Nature" takes the art of telling off a pretentious jerk to another level. Together, these tracks on the album give an in-depth understanding of Potvin's talents as a musician.

—MARIA KOTOVYCH / maria@vueweekly.com

Anni Rossi, Afon (4AD) It's no surprise this young songwriter found a home on 4AD, label-nest of the Mountain Goats. Rossi may be classically trained, but she has a glancing aural kinship to early, sonically ambitious but slightly shambolic

and skeletal offerings from John Darnielle. They share a reconstructive approach to songcraft—taking a piece that could be treated as straight-ahead folk, pop or rock, but magnifying an unexpected area or two, and muting or erasing others, so that what shines through becomes more a portrait of ambiguous encounters and moments, sharpened with a gleaming core of emotional fidelity. Rossi doesn't have the ferocity or history to draw on that her fellow 4AD-er does, but considering she's only 22 years old, her tidy debut EP shows a world of promise. Rossi and her spare orchestra—revolving around her modern-folksy viola and shapeshifting-coyote vocals, and occasionally embracing stuttering drums, clarinet and organ—rip through six odd little gems that alternate between woozy and ebullient and document everything from a declaration of love that posits an eternal youth of sorts to a homecoming that grows more fraught and distant the closer one gets to the destination. —MARY CHRISTA O'KEEFE / marychrista@vueweekly.com

MUSIC OLD SOUNDS

New Barbarians, Buried Alive: Live in Maryland (Wooden) Originally released: 2006 Keith Richards has always claimed the lion's share of the glory for himself within the Rolling Stones, and for good reason: he's Keith freakin' Richards—bigger than life and death both in presence and in riffs. But it would be impossible for Richards to come off the way he does—as a swaggering master of chordal riffs—if he had a lesser band behind him. The backbone of the band may be Charlie Watts' drumming, and Mick Jagger is a suitable vocal foil to Richards' guitar, but it's Ronnie Wood who is often overlooked in the band's game.

Since joining the group back in the '70s, Wood has been the eternal "new guy," but he's also brought something to the mix that wasn't there during the Stones' run of classic albums with Mick Taylor and Richards splitting guitar duties down the middle in a much more typical lead/rhythm fashion. With Wood, the guitars meld into one whole. This turns out to be the case regardless of who the two guitarists are playing with, as evidenced by this recording of a 1979 show by the New Barbarians, a group that was ostensibly led by Wood, but in which Richards' role is of utmost importance.

There's nothing revolutionary here—the New Barbarians sound more pub-rock than the arena-rock behemoth that the Stones had become by this point, but that's largely the charm of the admittedly rough-sounding tapes. It's not that this band sounds like it belongs locked in a closet someplace—just that the rough

and tumble approach features more than a few loose threads that hang freely instead of being wound tightly into the sound of the Stones.

Despite the difference, though, here's an opportunity to hear the sonic relationship between Wood and Richards transposed into another setting, where it remains largely the same, just with different shades of colour splashed across it.

With a setlist largely made up of Wood's solo material, with a few covers thrown in alongside several of Richards'

songs, the New Barbarians sound closest to the spots in a Stones' set when Richards takes the lead vocal for a couple of tunes that are inevitably slightly more ragged than when Jagger is there.

On *Buried Alive* the covers are sometimes slight diversions

that find the band throwing lines back and forth, having fun but not doing more than most other groups have done with songs like Big Bill Broonzy's "Rock Me Baby" and Chuck Berry's "Sweet Little Rock 'n' Roller."

At other times, though—on the pained, heartbroken take of Robert Johnson's "Love in Vain" and the sad and lonely reading of Johnny Paycheck's "Apartment #9," with Richards on vocals and piano and Wood picking the pedal steel—the music is more window into the souls of the players than a mirror reflecting their influences.

And then there are the Stones tunes: "Honky Tonk Women," "Jumpin' Jack Flash" and "Before They Make Me Run." Here, Richards and Wood sound alive and in the groove, slipping deep inside the songs and playing them—no, working them over—with everything they have. The Rolling Stones have had their moments, to be sure, but this one belongs to the New Barbarians. ▽



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CLUBS/LECTURES

AIKIDAI AIKIDO CLUB 1111-37 Ave. 1001
Strathcona Community League, www.alberta-aikido.org/ednaikikai/ • Japanese Martial Art of Aikido • Every Tue 7:30-9:30pm; Thu 6-8pm

AWA 12 STEP SUPPORT GROUP 6000
Presbyterian Church basement, N. door, 6
Bernard Dr, Bishop St, Sir Winston Churchill
Ave, St. Albert • For adult children of alcoholic
and dysfunctional families • Meet Mondays
including holidays, 7:30pm

CANADIAN NATIVE FRIENDSHIP CENTRE
11205-101 St, 780.479.1999 • Basketball; Mon
(5-7pm) • Healing Circle; Mon (6-8pm) •
Boxing; Mon/Thu (7-9pm); Tue (5-7pm) •
Volleyball; Tue (6-8pm) • Sewing Circle; Tue
(6-8pm) • Beadwork Class; Wed (6-8pm) •
C.N.F.C. Pow-wow; Wed (6-9pm) • Hip-Hop
Class; every Thu (5-7pm) • Cree Class; Thu (6-
8pm) • Elders and Residency; Fri (all day) •
Safe Using and Harm Reduction; last Fri each
month (11am-12pm) • Tobacco Reduction;
every Fri (1-2pm) • Drop-in Night; Fri (6-8pm)

CHESS Edmonton Chess Club and Society of
Alberta Chess Knights, 780.474.2318 • Learn to
play chess; opportunities for all ages includ-
ing classes, school programs and tournaments
• rovingchessnuts@shaw.ca

EDMONTON ESPERANTO SOCIETY 1812,
10025-102A Ave, 780.702.5117 • Fri,
noon-1pm • vaughn@sewardconsulting.com

EDMONTON NATURE CLUB Royal Alberta
Museum • Monthly meeting featuring Gerald
Romanchuk speaking on *Birding Alberta 2008*.
From Zama to Wildhorse • Fri, Dec 19, 7pm
(coffee), 7:30pm (meeting) • Admission by
donation

FREE FAMILY ART NIGHTS Nina Haggerty
Centre, 9702-111 Ave • For Parents and chil-
dren up to 17, materials, instruction and a light
snack are free • Every Thu, 6:30-8pm

IMAGES ALBERTA CAMERA CLUB
Pleasantview Community Hall, 10860-57 Ave,
780.469.9776/780.452.6224 • Featuring pre-
sentations, speakers, workshops, outings, and
competitions. All levels of photographers wel-
come • Meet the 2nd and 4th Thu each
month; Sept-May, 8pm; will not be meeting the
4th Thu in Dec • www.imagesab.com

**MEDITATION • Gaden Samten Ling
Tibetan Buddhist Meditation Society:**
11403-101 St, 780.479.0014, www.gaden-samtenling.org; Kushok Lobsang Dhamchoe;
beginner Tue, 7pm; intermediate Wed, 7pm;
adv. Sun, 11am-1pm • **Brahma Kumaris
World Spiritual Organization**, 208, 10132-
105 St, 780.425.1050, www.bkwsu.org; Raja
Yoga Meditation • **Meditation and
Buddhist practices** 10502-70 Ave,
780.633.6157, www.karmatashiling.ca; with
Tibetan tradition Lama Ani Kunsang. Beginners
welcome, instruction available; Wed, 7pm; free

RIVERDALE NET ZERO ENERGY HOUSE
9927-87 St, www.riverdalenetzero.ca • Get
ideas on energy savings from this zero energy
house open for self-guided tours most
Saturday afternoons until March, 1-4pm •
Free

SUGAR SWING DANCE CLUB 10860-57 Ave,
10860 57 Ave, 780.604.7572, www.sugar-swing.com • Swingin' Christmas Party • Dec
20 (beginner lesson 8pm, dance 9pm-12am) E:
dance@sugarswing.com

THOUGHTFUL TUESDAY DOCUMENTARY
Steeps Tea Lounge College Plaza, 11116-82
Ave, 11116 82 Ave, 780.988.8105 • Film/docu-
mentary series Thoughtful Tuesday
Documentary; Tue, Dec 23; cancelled •
Thoughtful Tuesday Documentary *The Devil
Came on Horseback*; Tue, Dec 30, 7pm

**TOASTMASTERS CLUBS • Chamber
Toastmasters Club:** Chamber of Commerce,
600, 9990 Jasper Ave, 780.459.5206; Thu, 6pm
• **MacEwan:** Grant MacEwan College, Rm 7-
297E, 10700-104 Ave, 780.633.3921; Fri, noon-
1pm • **N'Orators Toastmasters Club:**
Londonderry Public Library, www.norators.com;
Wed, 7-8:45pm • **Norwood Toastmasters
Club:** Kingsway Legion, 10425 Kingsway Ave,
780.456.3934, www.norwoodtoastmasters.org;
Thu, 8-10pm • **Power Speakers:** Grant
MacEwan Centre for the Arts, Rm 437, 10045-
156 St, 780.459.0642; Wed, 7-9pm •

Purners: Best Western Cedar Park Inn, 5116
Gateway Boulevard, 780.457.0808; Wed, 7-
9pm • **Charicleer:** Kingsway Rm, Millard
Health Building, 131 Airport Rd,
780.498.4608/780.474.1138; Thu, 7-8:30am •
Upward Bound: Rm 601 Norquest College
10215-108St, 780.488.4098/780.454.3720,
adamsrk@telus.net, Wed, 7-8:30pm

THE U.S. AND US Stanley A. Milner Library
Theatre • Showing of the film by Quinn.
Gordon Laxer and Quinn, will be present for
Q&A • Dec 18, 7:30pm • Free

WOMEN IN BLACK In front of the Old
Strathcona Farmers' Market • Silent vigil th-
1st and 3rd Sat, 10-11am, each month, stand
in silence for a world without violence

COMEDY

BONNIE DOON HALL 9240-93 St,
www.EdmontonChristmasParty.com •
Christmas party featuring hypnotist Terrance E
• Fri, Dec 19, 6pm-1am • \$65 at 780.475.03

COMEDY FACTORY Gateway Entertainment
Centre, 34th Ave, Calgary Trail • Thu, 8:30pm
Sat, 8pm and 10pm • Leaf Skiing; Dec 18,
• Closed Dec 24 and Dec 25

COMIC STRIP Bourbon St, WEM,
780.483.5999, www.thecomicstrip.ca • Hit
Miss Mondays: Each Mon • Best of Edmonton
Tuesdays: Each Tue • Tom Wilson Special
Concert Presentation; until Dec 21 • Derick
Lengwenus, Sean Lecomber, Shawn Gramig
Dec 26-28 • New Year's Eve, Rick Bronson
special concert, Star of *The Tourist*, 8-time
C.O.C.A. Comedian of the Year, AMPIA Award
for Best Male Host; Wed, Dec 31, 8pm, 6pm
(door, arrive no later than 7:30pm); tickets
available online

EDMONTON SCOTTISH SOCIETY 3101
St, www.AtomicImprov.com, www.ExtraLar
• An evening of improv and comedy featuring
Atomic Improv and Lars Callieou • Dec 19-20
• \$65 780.475.0333 or info@tnlec.com

THE LAUGH SHOP 1105-6606 137 Ave,
Londonderry Mall, 780.476.1010, www.the-laughshop.ca • Wed-Sat 8pm; Fri-Sat 8pm
and 10:30pm • Wed amateur night; 8pm •
Dave Nystrom; until Dec 20 • New Year's Eve
with Andrew Grose headlining with Winston
Herbert and CTV's Graham Neil as host and

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1. Radiohead - In Rainbows (tbd records)
2. Black Mountain - In The Future (scratch records)
3. Sam Baker - Pretty World (sam baker)
4. Rodney Crowell - Sex & Gasoline (story plain)
5. Ry Cooder - I, Flathead (nonesuch)
6. The Black Keys - Attack & Release (nonesuch)
7. KD Lang - Watershed (nonesuch)
8. Alejandro Escovedo - Real Animal (back porch)
9. Chad Vangaalen - Soft Airplane (fiemish eye)
10. Michael Franti & Spearhead - A Rebel Rockers (anti)
11. Amos Garrett - Get Way Back (story plain)
12. Justin Townes Earle - The Good Life (bloodshot)
13. The Steeldrivers - S/T (rounder)
14. Ndidi Ojukwulu - The Contradiction (michele bae)
15. Agnostic Mountain Gospel Choir - Ten Thousand (shoutin' abner pim)
16. Kings Of Leon - Only By The Night (rca)
17. Danny Michel - Feather, Fur & Fin (burnt bun)
18. Nick Cave & The Bad Seeds - Dig!!! Lazarus Dig!!! (anti)
19. Daniel Lanois - Here Is What Is (red floor)
20. Elliott Brood - Mountain Meadows (six shooter)
21. Lucinda Williams - Little Honey (lost highway)
22. Old Crow Medicine Show - Tennessee Pusher (riettwerk)
23. Van Morrison - Keep It Simple (exile)
24. Firewater - The Golden Hour (bloodshot)
25. Calxico - Carried To Dust (quarter stick)
26. Ian Tyson - Yellowhead To Yellowstone & Other Love Stories (story plain)
27. She & Him - Volume One (merge)
28. Mudcrutch - Mudcrutch (reprise)
29. Martha Wainwright - I Know You're Married... (maple)
30. Jeff Healy - Miss Of Blues (story plain)

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QUEER LISTINGS

AFFIRM SUNNYBROOK-RED DEER

Sunnybrook United Church, Red Deer, 403.347.6073 • Affirm welcome LGBTQ people and their friends, family, and allies meet the 2nd Tue, 7pm, each month

BOOTS BAR AND LOUNGE

780.423.5014, www.bootsbar.ca • 2nd Thu: Illusions Social Club • 3rd Wed: Edmonton O Society • 2nd Tue: Edmonton Rainbow Business Association • Every Fri: Philosophy Café • Fri and Sat DJ SexXXy Sean 10-3 • Long Weekend Sundays feature the Stardust Lounge with Miss Bianca and Vanity Fair

BUDDYS NITE CLUB

117258 Jasper Ave, 780.488.7736 • Open nightly 9pm-3am, Fri 8-10pm • Sun: Rotating drag shows with Mz Bianca and Mz Vanity Fair in The Stardust lounge and GoDiva and Donnatella NE1 in The Madonna Show, DJ WestCoastBabyDaddy • Mon: Amateur strip contest with Mia Fellow, midnight, DJ WestCoastBabyDaddy • Tue: Free pool and tourney, DJ Arrowchaser • Wed: Hump day with DJ SexXXy Sean • Thu: Wet underwear contest with Mia Fellow, midnight, DJ WestCoastBabyDaddy • Fri: We made 'em famous! DJ Eddy Toonflash, come early to avoid lineup, no cover before 10pm • Sat: Undie night for men only, free pool and tourney, DJ Arrowchaser

EDMONTON PRIME TIMERS (EPT) Unitarian Church of Edmonton, 10804-119 St • A group of older gay men and their admirers who have common social interests meet the 2nd Sun, 2:30pm, of most months for a social period, a short meeting and a guest speaker, discussion panel or a potluck supper. Special interest groups meet for other social activities throughout the month. email: edmontonpt@yahoo.ca, www.primetimer-sww.org/edmonton

GLBT SPORTS AND RECREATION

www.teamedmonton.ca • Women's Drop-In Recreational Badminton; Oliver School Gym, 10227-118 St 780.465.3620; Wed, 6-7:30pm • Bootcamp; Lynnwood Elementary School at 15451-84 Ave; Mon, 7-8:15pm;

bootcamp@teamedmonton.ca • Bowling; Gateway Lanes, 100, 3414 Gateway Blvd; Sat, 5-7pm; bowling@teamedmonton.ca • Curling; Mon, 7:15-9:15pm; Granite Curling Club, 780.463.5942 • Running; Sun, Tue, Thu; running@teamedmonton.ca • Swimming; NAIT pool, 11762-106 St; Tue, 8-9pm, Thu, 7:30-8:30pm; swimming@teamedmonton.ca • Volleyball; Tue Recreational; Mother Teresa Elementary School at 9008-105A, 8-10pm; Thu intermediate; Amiskiwacy Academy, 101 Airport Rd, 8-10pm; recvolleyball@teamedmonton.ca; volleyball@teamedmonton.ca • YOGA (Hatha); Free Yoga; every Sun, 2-3:30pm; Korezone Fitness, 203, 10575-115 St; yoga@teamedmonton.ca

ILLUSIONS SOCIAL CLUB Boots, 10242-106 St, 780.387.3343 • Crossdressers, transsexuals, friends and supporters meet 2nd Thu each month http://groups.yahoo.com/group/edmonton_illusions/

INSIDE/OUT U of A Campus • Campus-based organization for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered and queer (LGBTQ) faculty, graduate student, academic, straight allies and support staff • 3rd Thu each month (fall/winter terms); Speakers Series. Contact Kris (k wells@ualberta.ca)

KOREZONE FITNESS 203, 10575-115 St • **LIVING POSITIVE** 404, 10408-124 St, www.edmlivingpositive.ca, 1.877.975.9448/780.488.5768, • Providing confidential peer support to people living with HIV • Tue, 7-9pm: Support group • Daily drop-in, peer counselling

MADELEINE SANAM FOUNDATION Faculty St. Jean, Rm 3-18, 780.490.7332 • Program for HIV-AID'S prevention, treatment and harm reduction in French, English and other African languages • 3rd and 4th Sat, 9am-5pm each month • Free (member)/\$10 (membership) • Pre-registered

MAKING WAVES SWIMMING CLUB

www.geocities.com/makingwaves_edm • Recreational and competitive swimming with coaching, beginners encouraged to participate. Socializing after practices • Every Tue, Thu

PFLAG Pride Centre, 9540-111 Ave • A support group for parents and friends of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer people • Meet

the 1st Wed each month September-June, 7-9pm; T. Ruby 780.436.1998 after 6pm; E: edmontonab@pflagcanada.ca

PLAY NIGHTCLUB

10220-103 St, www.playnightclub.ca • Open Thu, Fri, Sat • The first bar for the queer community to open in a decade with DJs Alexx Brown and Eddie Toonflash

PRIDE CENTRE OF EDMONTON

9540-111 Ave, 780.488.3234, www.pridecentreofedmonton.org • Open Tue-Fri 1-10pm, Sat 2-6:30pm • LGBT Seniors Drop-in: Every Tue/Thu, 2-4pm • CA: Every Thu (7pm) • Suit Up and Show Up: AA big book study group meet every Sat, noon • Youth Understanding Youth: Youth up to 25 years, support and social group meet every Sat, 7-9pm; yuy@shaw.ca • Womonspace: Board meeting 1st Sun each month, 10:30am-12:30pm • Trans Education/Support Group: Meet the 1st and 3rd Sun, 2-4pm, of each month; www.albertatrans.org • Men Talking with Pride: Every Sun (7pm); facilitator: Rob Wells robwells780@hotmail.com • HIV Support Group: Meet the 2nd Mon of each month, 7pm • Transgender, Transsexual, Intersex and Questioning (TTIQ) Alliance; Support meeting the 2nd Tue each month, 7:30pm • Transgender Transsexual, Intersex and Questioning, Education, advocacy and support for men, women and youth; PFLAG Edmonton: Meet the 1st Wed each month, 7pm • Free short-term, solution-focused drop-in counseling; every Wed, 7-10pm • YouthSpace: drop-in for LGBTQ for youth up to 25; Tue-Sat, 3-7pm

ROBERTSON-WESLEY UNITED CHURCH

10209-123 St, 780.482.1587, www.rwuc.org • Soul OUTing: an LGBT-focused alternative worship • 3rd Sun each month, 7pm; worship Sun, 10:30am; people of all sexual orientations welcome. A LGBT monthly book club and a bi-monthly film night. Info email: jravenscroft@rwuc.org

ST. PAUL'S UNITED CHURCH 11526-76 Ave, 780.436.1555 • People of all sexual orientations are welcome • Every Sun (10am worship)

WOMONSPACE 780.482.1794, www.womonspace.ca, womonspace@gmail.com • A Non-profit lesbian social organization for Edmonton and surrounding area. Organized monthly activities from dances, games nites, golf tournament, etc. Monthly newsletter and reduced rates included with membership. Confidentiality

assured

WOODY'S 11723 Jasper Ave, 780.488.6557 • Open Daily (noon) • Sat-Tue Karaoke with Tizzy and Patrick • Sat-Sun Pool Tournaments

SPECIAL EVENTS

ALBERTA LEGISLATURE 10829-98 Ave, www.assembly.ab.ca • Voices in the Rotunda • Winter Wonderland: Ice sculptures • Events in the Pedway: Craft table for kids, displays by local schools • Through to Dec 23

THE BLACK RIBBON BALL Holiday Inn, 4520-78 Ave • Countdown to 2009: Presented by the West Indian Canadian Cultural Association to celebrate the New Year and in support of stopping violence • Wed, Dec 31, cocktails at 7pm, dinner at 8pm and dance to follow • \$75 • Tickets and info available at 780.242.6368, 780.710.6499, 780.993.3823

BRIGHTNIGHTS Hawrelak Park, www.edmontonchamber.com • Until Jan 4, 5-10pm

A CHILD'S CHRISTMAS IN WALES

Rutherford House, 11153 Saskatchewan Dr, 780.427.3995, www.culture.alberta.ca • Dylan Thomas' holiday story narrated by Vivien Bosley with music by Celtic harpist Goron Ritchie • Dec 27-29 • \$10 (adult)/\$8 (senior/youth 7-17); phone to book

ETS CHRISTMAS LIGHTS TOURS Leave from City Hall (south side) on 102A Ave • Edmonton Transit System tours visit Bright Nights in Hawrelak Park, the Legislative Grounds for lights, carolers and hot chocolate. The buses are wheelchair accessible • Until Dec 21, Mon-Fri depart: 6pm, 6:15pm and 6:30pm; Sat, Sun depart: 5:30pm and 5:45pm • \$3 (each)

NEW YEARS EVE DOWNTOWN Edmonton Downtown Sir Winston Churchill Square and surrounding precinct, www.eventsedmonton.ca • A non-alcoholic, family event with a skating party in front of City Hall, snow ball throwing challenge, street dance, a bonfire, entertainment and family crafts at Stanley A. Milner Library and City Hall. CBC-Radio Canada Interactive Space, Edmonton City Centre featuring young Edmonton entertainers. Interpretive Centre, Sir Winston Churchill Square featuring mask making • Wed, Dec. 31, 7:30pm (City Hall), 9pm (other venues), mid-night (Pyrotechnics on Sir Winston

Churchill Square) • Free; Edmonton Transit provides free service downtown between 6pm and 3am

NEW YEARS EVE FAMILY GALA Sherwood Park-Broadmoor Lake Park, Oak Street and Sherwood Drive, Sherwood Park, 780.467.2211, www.strathona.ab.ca • Skating, tobogganing, a bonfire, roving entertainers, hot dogs, hot chocolate and fireworks • Wed, Dec. 31

WINTER SOLSTICE City Hall • A Pagan focused solstice service, hosted by the Westwood Unitarian Congregation. One hour gathering featuring music and singing, stories and ritual chanting • Sun, Dec 21, 2pm • Free, a collection will be taken in support of iHuman and Operation Friendship: www.westwoodunitarian.ca, 780.434.5819

KARAOKE

BILLY BOB'S SPORTS BAR Continental Inn, 16625 Stony Plain Rd, 780.484.7751 • Wed 8pm-12am, Thu, Fri, Sat 9:30pm-1:30am: With Almost Famous

BO DIDDY'S-NW (ROADHOUSE) 142 St, 118 Ave • Sat 10pm-2am: with Gord's Ultimate Karaoke show

CAMPUS SPORTS BAR 10807-106 Ave, 780.420.1530 • Karaoke night: Tue and Fri 9pm-1am, hosted by Brian Olson • Saturday night: DJ Hip hop

CROWN AND ANCHOR 15277 Castledowns Rd, 780.472.7696 • Thu 10:30pm • Wed: Name that Tune

DOYLE'S PUB 2619-151 Ave • Fri: with Sheri; 9:30pm • Sat: with Ewan; 9:30pm

DRUID 11606 Jasper Ave • Wed nights: with Gary from Mr. Entertainment

GAS PUMP 10166-114 St, 780.488.4841 • Tue, Wed 9pm-1:30am: Gord's Best Live Singing Show

INGLEWOOD PUB 12402-118 Ave, 780.451.1390 • Thu, hosted by Gordon; Fri: hosted by Shawna; Sat: hosted by Jolly Greg Giant, 9:30pm-2am

KNIGHTS PUB SOUTH 1919-105 St, 780.461.0587 • Fri 10pm-2am: Gord's Best Live Singing Show

ZODIAC FREE WILL ASTROLOGY

ROB BREZSNY
freewill@vuwweekly.com

ARIES (MAR 21 - APR 19)

What I foresee for you in 2009 is an upgrade in your approach to creating and maintaining your alliances. I envision you having dramatically enhanced intuition about how to connect with people in satisfying and interesting ways. I picture you being able to push beyond your habit-bound ways of conducting your relationships, ensuring that you'll be entertained and moved by them more than ever before. If I could give you a symbolic holiday gift to inspire you in this work, it might be a long, thick golden thread interwoven with a long, thick silver thread. Happy Holy Daze, Aries!

TAURUS (APR 20 - MAY 20)

Happy Holy Daze, Taurus! If I were going to give you a holiday gift, it might be a ticket to go visit your imaginary friend—you know, the invisible ally you've been neglecting ... the sweet, fierce companion who lives in the threshold between the light and dark ... the "other you" who abides there patiently on the cusp between waking and dreaming, hoping that someday you will fully embrace your relationship. Don't worry, your imaginary friend isn't demanding or possessive in the least, but mostly just wants you to think of your link every now and then so that you might feel less alone.

GEMINI (MAY 21 - JUN 20)

One of your most fun assignments in 2009 will be not only to think way outside of the box but also to think way outside of the bigger and more interesting (but nonetheless

less boxy) boxes that all the outside-the-box thinkers customarily think inside. That's why, if I could give you a Christmas, Hanukkah, Solstice and Kwanza gift, it would be a nice, clean, square, white box punched full of big holes with ragged edges where the inside has burst into the outside. Happy Holy Daze, Gemini!

CANCER (JUN 21 - JUL 22)

In the Broadway play *Passing Strange*, the narrator Stew says, "You know how one morning you wake up as an adult and you realize your entire life is based on a decision you made as a teenager?" If that description applies to you, Cancerian, 2009 will be the best year ever to do something about it. In the coming months, you will have the power to correct errors or misjudgments you made way back when. You'll be able to figure out how to start over in an area of your life that you've always assumed you were doomed to accept just the way it is. You may even find that you can, in a sense, change the past and reconfigure your memories.

LEO (JUL 23 - AUG 22)

Happy Holy Daze, Leo! If I could give you one gift for the holidays, it might be a magic object to add to your love altar—something like a pomegranate resting on red velvet, or a golden heart-shaped magnet, or Pablo Neruda's book *100 Love Sonnets*. What? You don't have a love altar? Well then please begin creating one as soon as possible, and continue building it throughout 2009. For the next 12 months, the time will be right to get smarter, wilder and kinder in your approach to creating intimate connection.

VIRGO (AUG 23 - SEP 22)

"My deepest emotional wound has also been the source of inexhaustible blessings." I'm not going to tell you why that statement is true for me—it's way too personal—but I assure you that it's one of the fundamental facts about my destiny. Could you make a similar assertion, Virgo? Is it possible to interpret your life in such a way that you could see how a painful experience you suffered in the past has also given you tremendous insight, inspiration and vitality? Two thousand nine will be an excellent year to make that leap of understanding. And the time around the solstice—right now!—is a perfect moment to get started.

LIBRA (SEP 23 - OCT 22)

At Salon.com's forum "Table Talk," participants were urged to come up with a six-word sentence that captured the essence of their lives. One person wrote, "Broke. Payday. Broke. Payday. Broke. Payday." Another said, "Oh, no, not again. Again. Again." But the testimony I really wanted to call your attention to is this: "I never learned how to swashbuckle." Why is this pertinent for you? Because I believe that if you have a similar regret—that you've never mastered the art of swashbuckling—you will have an excellent chance to fix that problem in the coming months. In fact, I'm tempted to name 2009 as the Year of the Swashbuckle for you Libras. If I could give you a symbolic holiday gift to get you started, it might be a superhero's costume created by a top fashion designer. Happy Holy Daze!

SCORPIO (OCT 23 - NOV 21)

Happy Holy Daze, Scorpio! If I could give you one symbolic gift to set the right tone for 2009, it might be a clear glass vase

with a potato growing partially submerged in water, allowing you to see its gnarly roots. I'd hope that would inspire you to put diligent yet playful effort into getting reacquainted with and exploring your own personal source code—you know, the master plan of your life that you formulated before you were born. The coming months will be an excellent time to cultivate a wise innocence as you get to the bottom of who you really are.

SAGITTARIUS (NOV 22 - DEC 21)

Let's say that on Christmas Eve, Santa Claus hopes to deliver toys to every child who believes in him. Thanks to the fact that his distribution area stretches over many time zones, he'll have at least 24 hours to accomplish this feat. Still, that means he's got to visit approximately a thousand homes per second. I don't know what astrological sign Santa is, but if he's a Sagittarius he'll have the highest possible chance at success. Beginning any day now, and lasting throughout 2009, your tribe will have the potential to move faster, think quicker and multi-task better than every other tribe. If I were going to give you a symbolic holiday gift, it would be greased lightning. Happy Holy Daze!

CAPRICORN (DEC 22 - JAN 19)

Four out of every five people testify that if such a thing were possible, they would buy more time. If you're one of those four, I'm here to tell you that conditions in the coming months will provide some interesting opportunities. While you may not be able to actually purchase more of that precious commodity, it's quite possible that you'll be able to legally steal it, barter for it and even create it from scratch. I've

got to be cryptic here, because the promise I'm hinting at is of course not true in a strictly literal sense: you'll have to tweak your imagination and think a bit sideways and upside-down in order to cash in on the temporal expansions that will be available.

AQUARIUS (JAN 20 - FEB 18)

When she applied for admission to New York University as an undergraduate, Rehka Malhotra was rejected. Years later, after she'd become a well-known Brooklyn DJ, that same school invited her to teach a class, "Pop Culture: South Asians in the U.S." "It was the sweetest revenge," she told *Good* magazine. I predict a comparable development for you in the coming year, Aquarius. You will find power in a place where you were formerly weak, or you will achieve success in a situation that once shut you out.

PISCES (FEB 19 - MAR 20)

Happy Holy Daze, Pisces! My gift to you is advice about the coming year. First, read this quote from WH Auden's book *The Dyer's Hand*. "A daydream is a meal at which images are eaten. Some of us are gourmets, some gourmands, and a good many take their images precooked out of a can and swallow them down whole, absent-mindedly and with little relish." With this as your touchstone, I urge you to be a gourmet in your approach to daydreaming during 2009. It will be time for you to make your fantasy life into an art form instead of a chaotic, unconscious diversion. If you put more intention into your generation of mental images, you will find yourself better able to create what you really want. ♥

You're in control

QUEERMONTON

TAMARA GORZALKO
tam@vueweekly.com

Last month Queermonton interviewed lesbian porn mogul Nan Kinney. Here is the second half of the conversation with the prolific producer.

VUE WEEKLY: Do you think there are going to be a lot of successful lesbian porn websites soon?

NAN KINNEY: I'm happy to see that there are at least a couple. You've got one up there in Vancouver with Good Dyke Porn and then the Crash Pad series, it's really exciting to see this kind of branching out. The market is growing. I would hope it does, I'm feeling positive about it, more individuals are going to get involved in this.

We're trying to do a redesign on our site

to put downloading and VOD [Video on Demand]. Hopefully we're going to have that in the next few months. Eventually DVDs are going to be phased out. Right now we're still selling them, people still want them. But down the line I think that's going to be the main delivery system, whether it's through the Internet or to your TV.

VW: Why do you think women have such a hard time admitting that they like porn?

NK: It's all that social and societal upbringing; women aren't supposed to be outwardly sexual, it's somehow shameful for women to openly admit it. It's society's expectations on women, how they're cornered into these roles: mother/whore. I think it's really hard. Women have to be brave to break out of that.

VW: How do you try to fight through that?

NK: It's been a whole process. When we

first started in the early '80s, there was just nothing for women. I used to say back then, it's kind of like doing missionary work. You have to take it out there, show them that it's alright.

We got a lot of crap for it: negative reactions, hate letters. It's definitely changed since then. First of all you have to market to women. You have to make pretty covers, make products they might actually enjoy, instead of just trying to force the crappy kind of mainstream porn and porn products—it's kind of like this whole little industry has opened up around women's sexuality. Really well made sex toys, really good books, comfortable shopping experiences for women.

VW: If lesbian porn is a niche market, pornography with trans men must be an even smaller one. Do you think that's ever going to expand?

NK: I think there are people interested in it. It's never going to be gigantic, but these smaller niche markets are just slower to build. People have to admit it to themselves. It's so hard to come out as

trans and then they have to get into the porn side of it, it's a slower process.

VW: If someone wants to get started in checking out lesbian porn, say for the holiday season, and you wanted to ease them into it, where would you suggest they start?

NK: Everything that SIR productions has done is great. Like *How to Fuck in High Heels* and *Hard Love*. A little story, nice women, edgy sex. Very intelligently done, the same with *Sugar High Glitter City*. I would start with something that has a little bit of a plot to bring you in, is intelligent, has some good dialogue. I would start there and see how you feel. Maybe check out some of the stuff online, like CrashPadSeries.com, watch a little bit and see how you like it. Same with your gals up there at GoodDykePorn.com, watch about eight or 10 minutes and see how you like it. Test it out, watch a little clip and see if it does anything for you.

If you watch a whole movie and even if you only see one or two things that turned you on, then the movie was worth it. The

whole 60 minutes, not every minute of it is going to float your boat. That's what fast forward is for, just go to the parts that you like, don't sit there and watch stuff you don't like. You're in control, it's not in control of you, you're in control of it, just like sex.

VW: Lastly, you're in California, with everything going on right now, do you have any thoughts on Proposition 8?

NK: Oh, it's so distressing! The whole thing, we had this whole high of everything, Barack Obama getting elected, what a huge thing on many levels in this country. Even for our little business. And then we had this smack down with this religious right coming back again to attack people for loving each other. It's just hideous. It's going to take time, I've been in this business for 25 years, I've seen a lot of changes. It does happen, we just have to keep at it. I believe it's going to happen, same-sex marriage is going to be legal in California, sooner or later. Hopefully sooner.

Fatale's lesbian porn catalogue is available at fatalemedia.com.

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ANDREA MEMERSON
altsex@altsexcolumn.com

AK ANDREA:

We've been married close to 10 years. I didn't marry him because we were over each other's heads in love. I was only 21 when we met, but already felt that being in love was a lie. It was something you see in movies, read in these romance novels. It was silly and it doesn't last. I did love him in my way and he loves me in the 10 years we've been together, we've seen many marriages fail. But we are still together and doing OK. My question is, can someone just suddenly become asexual? We've never had a burning hot sexual relationship. When we first met it was once every couple days, then as time went on it was once every two weeks all

the way to once every three months. Now it's something like once every six months or so. It never lasts very long, but I chalk that up to it being so infrequent that he can't last.

Then recently he told me he didn't like blow jobs anymore and didn't want them. Then just about a week ago we were watching a program on different relationships. When it got to this group of asexuals he said that sounded like him. I was baffled! He's 40 years old. He's been sexually active for better than 25 years. (He started kinda young) Now after 10 years of marriage he's suddenly lost all interest? Is he truly asexual? Or do you think there's something else?

LOVE, GAFLETT

DEAR RAE:

I think there's something, and I think your story, which sounds so weird to you, is just the sort-of-extreme end of a typical pattern.

People do tend to have less sex (a little or a lot less, depending) as the initial honeymoon high fades and as other responsibilities (I'm looking at you kids) and distractions accumulate. How much it cools and how cold it gets is to some extent under our own control and some extent not—if there's not much flame there to begin with it doesn't take much to quench it and pour water on the embers and metaphor, metaphor. There are so many factors besides simple neglect that could be in play here, though, that I hesitate to give you an airy pronouncement of "you didn't use it, you lost it." There's got to be some element of that going on here, though. You guys didn't use it much, did you?

I was making some notes for a revision of my "sex after parenthood" class recently and when I got to the "use it or lose it" segment I had that haunted feeling of something familiar, hovering just out of reach. What did this situation remind me of, and what had I done about it? Finally I realized it was hiking, of all things, that way back when I had the leisure to go hiking with a friend every

week I used to look for excuses to put it off, it sounded hard, I didn't have the energy, I just wanted to be left alone to read my book ... and then I'd heave myself up and go and it would be the greatest thing ever. So. That's my prescription for sexual atrophy/avoidance: get up, put on your boots and just do it. Except maybe without the boots, unless you're into that.

Contrary to popular supposition, lack of sex does not necessarily make people horny; it often makes them yawny instead. Sex breeds sex. A really hot evening's entertainment leads to really hot memory/reverie over coffee in the morning and lascivious thoughts come sundown. But all of this is couples' stuff, and there is something else going on with your husband on the unilateral side.

Asexuality in the recent, current understanding is more of a lifelong thing, an inborn tendency kind of like homosexuality except for the whole "sexuality" part. Sure, there are people whose traumatic sexual histories cause a total shut-down but I'd call that sexual aversion rather

than asexuality. And I'd guess that your husband is suffering from a combination of acquired low libido caused by not having much sex or much passion at home, plus low testosterone (doesn't like blow jobs all of a sudden is cause for concern). That last one can actually be tested, and I'd be happy to be proved wrong but even happier to be proved right, since a little supplementation and, as they say (confusingly) Bob's your uncle.

But you know what? This is a really stupid thing to play guessing-games about. Your husband is sitting right there and he doesn't really look all that busy, you know? What did you say when he made his startling pronouncement? Did you actually ask him if he's always felt pretty much asexual (in which case sucks to be you) or if it's only recently seemed like something other people crave in a way he just doesn't get? Maybe you need to have more sex to get more sex, or maybe you need to come to terms with a sexless marriage, but either way you'd best get busy.

LOVE, ANDREA

Writers to become Prevention Educators for its RespectED Violence and Abuse Prevention Program. Canadian Red Cross/RespectED Training Program. Phone toll 2008. www.redcross.ca/cnar. Education Coordinator: 780.702.4158 / E: edmonton.respect-ed@redcross.ca

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